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by Edmond Hamilton

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Front cover painting by Malcolm Smith, suggested by, "Corridor Of The Suns"

Published bi-monthly by Greenleaf Publishing Company, 814 Dempster St., Evanston, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio. Address all communications to IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Illinois. We do not accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or art work; submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed return envelopes. Accepted material is subject to whatever revision is necessary to meet requirements, and will be paid for at our current rates. The names of all characters used in stories are fictitious; any resemblance to any person living or dead is coincidental. Copyright 1958 Greenleaf Publishing Company. Subscription rate $3.00 12 issues. Advertising rates sent upon request. Printed in U.S.A. by Stephens Printing Corp., Sandusky, Ohio.

The Editorial

We've heard a lot of talk recently that science fiction might just as well close up its space hangars and depart. The point is made that afterall, the *fiction* is just about gone from the subject matter.

This profound observing is made, of course, from people who until a few short months ago had hardly heard of science fiction—except that it was some sort of "Buck Rogerish" material predominant in the comic market. We got news for them.

Science fiction will be the biggest literary bonanza yet. And happily, these people who have now discovered the subject via Sputnik et al, will be the ones to boom the field. Fact is their curiosity is now aroused. Despite a naturally inclined negative approach ("your fiction is now fact,") these neophytes to the spaceways will have to whet their normally detective or western appetites on the "doings up yonder." And there's lots doing.

Perhaps this is a sort of backhanded way of welcoming the mass audience into the field. But let's face it, we've been talking space flight for decades, knowing it would come. So we can't help shaking a reprimanding finger at all the pupils who are just now enrolling in our school. They really didn't have to wait for the Russians to ring the bell!

So class will come to order and the work of the day is sitting back and relaxing while teacher takes you on a myriad journeys to a myriad stars. There's plenty of mystery up there and most of it will be a perilous challenge to Man for the next several centuries. The frontiers to conquer are endless and each one will have its bright hope and danger. It'll be fun to experience it—vicariously through science fiction. And yet there's more than fun involved, for we know that herein lies the destiny of mankind. He can no more avoid it than taking his next breath. It's awesome and frightening—because it's the universe. A word we can't understand too easily, for how do you pin down something that is infinite? And yet in science fiction we'll pin it down—at least to a small picture in each story. We'll fabricate an adventure into that vast unknown beyond Earth's atmosphere. Each of us may not personally journey into space in our lifetime, but science fiction will give us a glimpse from the safety of our armchair.

Close up the space hangars? We can't. There's a crowd in the doorway, pressing for a look inside. We're glad to oblige .....*wlh*

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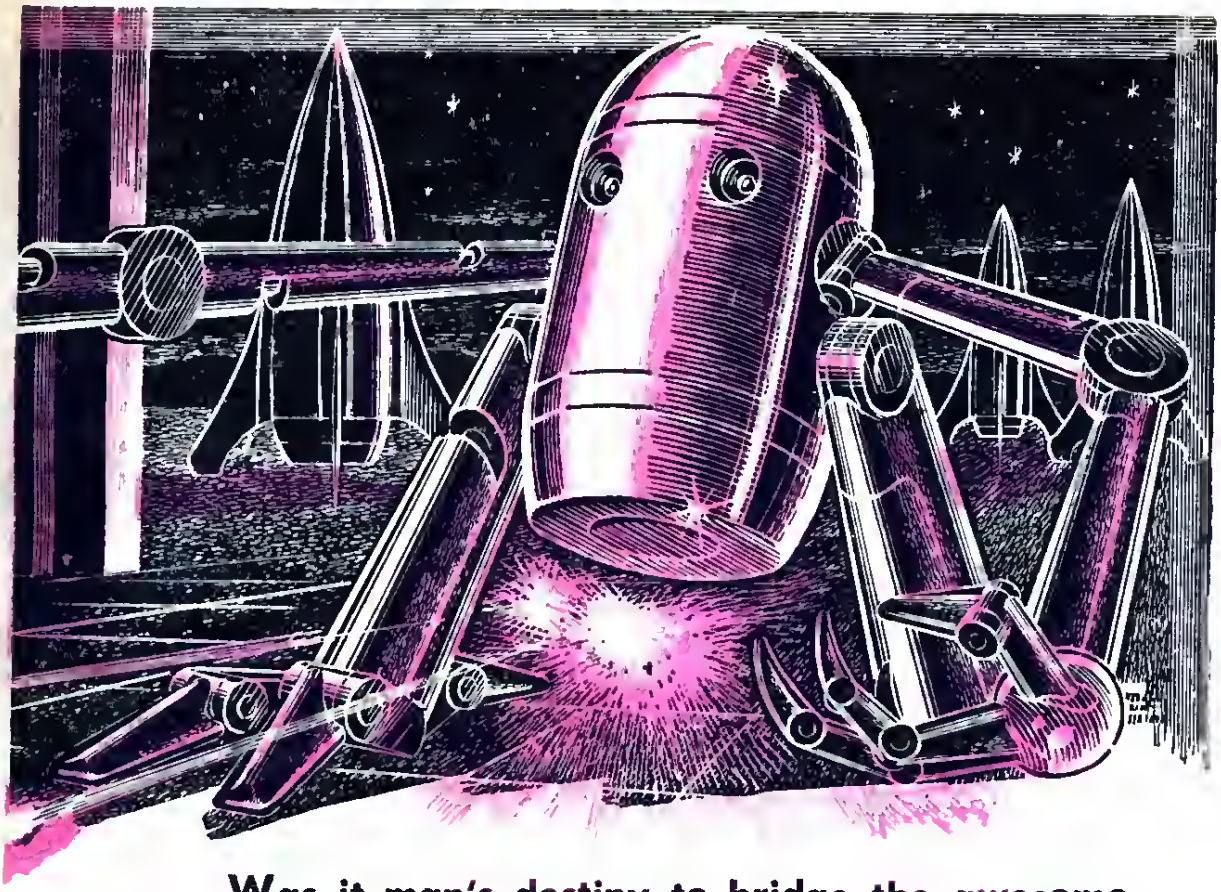


Was it man's destiny to bridge the awesome depths between the galaxies? Evers was hunted as a criminal for daring to dream he could find a —

Corridor Of The Suns

by

Edmond Hamilton

IF THE SHADOW trailing him was danger, Vance Evers wanted to know it now. He stood, the hand in his pocket clutching the sweaty hilt of his gun, and peered back along the street.

It was night, but the unpaved street was not dark. There was no artificial illumination, for Valloa was too backward and barbaric

a world for that. But the jungles of that world are rich in crystalline outcrops, and the squat and oddly-architectured houses and shops and taverns were all built of shimmering crystal blocks, a fairy-like glass town flashing back the radiance of the River of Stars in the sky.

Evers felt desperately uncertain. There were many Valloan men and women in the street back there, going about their own affairs. Yet he could not shake off the conviction that one of them was following him. He felt suddenly too tired and numb to cope with another danger now—too crushed down by the weight of the past weeks, by the weight of the most perilous secret in the galaxy.

"Too far," thought Evers. *"The dark between the galaxies, the dark that universes drown in, and oh God, to go all that way and come back to this—"*

A chime of intolerable sweetness sounded across the shimmering town. The men of Valloa make many things of crystal, and the music of their bells is famous. But the rising, tinkling chorus of carillons only clawed at Evers' taut nerves.

He stood, backed against a glassy wall, his dishevelled blond hair and weary, copper-tanned face making him a stand-out among the white-skinned, flame-haired Valloans. He looked back for minutes, while the bells talked in sweet and complex chimings above his head.

Nothing. Yet he was still sure that someone had followed him almost from the time he had come into the town.

He had to go on. There was nothing else he could do. Out in their ship, which they had landed with such secrecy in the jungle, his two comrades were waiting—Straw hurt, and Lindeman near a physical breakdown. And he, Evers, was their one hope now.

He went on abruptly, down the dusty street between the fairy crystal houses, with the singing of the bells all about him and the great belt of light lying like a sword across the black sky. Valloa was a fringe world, on the very rim of the galaxy, and because of that its people forever saw the galaxy edge-on, and called it the River of Stars. And also because it was a fringe world, it had only lately been touched by galactic civilization, and its hunters and thieves and crystal-miners had not much altered their ancient ways. Only a brassy neon glare of limited extent far ahead of Evers proclaimed the whereabouts of the Galactic Federation spaceport and offices and schools.

Evers went that way. He knew very well how risky it was, but there was a man he knew, a man named Garrow who was in the scientific mission that had been sent to this fringe world. If he could find Garrow without letting himself be caught, he might be able to pass on the explosive secret that they three had brought back from the shores of infinity.

He had had to argue that out with Lindeman, before he left the *Phoenix*. Lindeman, his face drawn and yellow with fatigue so that he looked like a starved marmoset, had been against it.

"We know that the Galactic Control all over the galaxy will be on the lookout for us," he had said. "*And* Schuyler's agents."

"Which means," Evers had pointed out, "that we've got to get word up to the top brass at Earth, before we dare come out in the open. Garrow can do it, if I can contact him."

And so he had left them in the ship in the jungle, and had trudged into the crystal town, and that big "if" was coming up fast now.

Again, Evers looked back uneasily. There were fewer people in the street now, as he approached the edge of the Valloan town and the limits of the Federation area. The only near one was a Valloan girl with hair like a torch, sauntering along with her hips wiggling in her skin-tight silken pants, pure provocation to all male eyes that might be watching. He could see no one else within a block, and he decided that he was starting at shadows.

HE WENT BEYOND the last crystal house, and the glaring lighted buildings and starport of the compound rose up ahead of him. And over the crystal chiming, a harsh voice spoke suddenly behind him.

"Just a minute, mister—do I know you?"

It was an Earthman's voice, and it had Galactic Control in every timbre of it. Evers swung around frantically, his fist balled.

The GC patrolman who had spoken from the deep doorway was too fast for him. He leaped back, and his energy-gun was in his hand as he finished the movement.

"Thought so," he said with satisfaction. "Know every Earthman on Valloa. We'll just have a look at your ident—"

His voice trailed off. He looked at Evers' coppery, sweating face, illumined by the soft radiance of the River of Stars. And the patrolman suddenly stiffened.

"Just hold still, mister," he said, his voice now low and even. "I *wouldn't* move if I were you."

The gun in his band still covered Evers. The patrolman fished a little plastic gadget out of his pocket, with the other hand. He touched it, and a pinpoint of light shone from it. He stared into it, holding it up so that his view would also include Evers.

Evers knew very well what it was. A micro-film file with its own magnifier. Every GC patrolman carried one, and in it would be—

"Vance Evers!" The patrolman spoke the name with excitement that had a touch of awe in it. His gun came up a trifle higher. "So you're one of the—" He broke off, then asked swiftly, "Where are the others?"

"The others?" said Evers. He felt a fierce rage and disappointment, and he knew that he was going to do a fool thing. He knew he would try to jump the patrolman and he knew he would fail.

"Eric Lindeman, John Straw," rapped the patrolman. "Don't try to dummy up, Evers. It's all in the micro-bulletin with your pictures. Wanted for violation of Galactic Council directives and—"

Evers saw something move behind the man. It was a small band, flat and edge-on, that flashed up and struck the back of the patrolman's neck.

The GC man's eyes suddenly widened and filmed. His mouth opened ludicrously, and he toppled swiftly forward, stunned.

Evers looked over his fallen form at the red-haired Valloan girl. She had come up behind the patrolman quite silently on her bare feet. He gawked at her, and her green eyes flashed at him impatiently.

"Do you *want* to be taken?" she demanded. Her hand grabbed his wrist. "All right, come on then."

Evers was tugged along by her, around the corner and then in a half-run down a narrow alley between the close-clustered crystal houses, before he found his voice.

"Why the devil would you—"

She turned swiftly and faced him. "I hate police, Earthman. It's reason enough. But if you'd rather I hadn't interfered, all right!"

Evers, his brain beginning to work, thought that she was probably telling the truth about her hatred of police. Valloans were a race to whom the profession of thief was hereditary and respected.

Over the ringing sweetness of the chimes that filled the air cut the harsh shrillness of a siren whistle. Instantly, Evers was reminded of the desperate nature of his situation. He had failed to reach Garrow, and the attempt must be given over for now. He had to get back to the hidden ship and wait for another chance.

The Valloan girl seemed to read his face, for she turned and ran up a stairway that hroke the crystal facade beside them. "This way!"

Evers ran after her, his boots slipping clumsily on the worn crystal steps. The girl ahead of him was not wiggling and bouncing now —her long legs moved like an antelope's. Drugged with fatigue as he was, Evers was panting when they reached the roof.

Under the radiance of the cataract of suns that belted the sky, stretched a bewildering labyrinth of glittering roofs. The chiming of crystal hells was overpoweringly loud up here, coming from all directions but loudest from just ahead. Then he saw, on the next flat roof, the old Valloan man who squatted before his double row of queer conical crystal bells, tapping them with his little hammers, adding his own peculiar chiming rhythm to the ringing confusion that throbbed through the night. Mentally, Evers damned the Valloan fondness for their queer music that kept some of them on the roofs half the night.

"It's all right, old Oriden never sees anything when he's at his bells," said the girl. "We'd better hurry."

Evers thought they had hetter. More whistles had joined the first, back toward the Federation compound. He went across the roofs with the girl and didn't ask where it was they went.

SHE DUCKED down a stairway in the middle of the roof, and he followed her down into a corridor that was almost totally dark. He felt glad to be out of the full impact of those chimes.

She opened a door, and he followed her through into a room equally dark. The door closed, and then Evers uttered a little exclamation, his eyes wincing. She had suddenly struck fire to a lamp, and he was momentarily dazzled. The soft little flame of the lamp was reflected brilliantly from the faceted crystal walls and floor and ceiling.

"How you people can stand all this crystal—," he began, and then stopped He looked at her suspiciously. "What's this place? And who are you?"

"I'm Sharr," she said. "And it's my place. And you're safe here—for a while."

Evers looked around, and thought that it was a hell of a thing that his great dream, the great thing that he and Straw and Lindeman had done—should have led him only to this—a backwater fringe-planet and a poorly furnished room of crystal, and a Valloan girl with red hair and a sexy shape, who

stood and inspected him with curious green eyes.

"You didn't stick your neck out just because you hate police," Evers told her. "Why did you?"

She shrugged her bare shoulders. "Earthmen are rich. Everyone knows that. One would pay well, I thought, to escape arrest."

Evers ran his hand wearily over his face, and told her, "I've got a few credits on me, but not too many. But I'll have more later, and—"

He stopped. Sharr wasn't listening to him. She was looking past him, at the door behind him, and her green eyes were wide with fear, her mouth falling open.

Evers spun around instantly, his hand frantically scooping in his pocket for his weapon.

There was nobody at all behind him.

He heard a hand whizz through the air but he couldn't turn back in time. A stunning blow hit the nerve-centers in his neck, and skyrockets went off gloriously inside his head.

He woke, how much later he did not know, with a filthy headache. It was some minutes before he became conscious of anything but the pounding of his head. When he did, it was to find his face against the smooth crystal floor.

Evers began to remember. Raging, he tried to scramble up, and discovered at once that his wrists were tightly bound behind him.

He rolled over. The girl Sharr sat in a low chair three feet away, one silk-clad leg crossed over the other, smiling down at him with happy eyes.

"Did you think I didn't know who you are?" she said. "Why do you suppose I followed you, and risked snatching you away from that GC man? A fortune—and you walk right into my hands!"

"You're out of your mind," Evers said thickly. "I told you how much I have."

Sharr laughed. "It's not how much you have, but how much you'll *bring*. You're Vance Evers. One of the men who went to Andromeda Galaxy."

CHAPTER II

THE CRYSTAL chimes of Valloa whispered down into the room from above, their throbbing tinkling rising and falling in the silence.

Evers lay and looked up at the girl, and then he laughed mirthlessly. "Do you have any idea how far away Andromeda Galaxy is?"

"Very far, they say," Sharr answered. "They told exactly how far, in the news." She added, "We

do get the news bulletins now, you know, since the Federation decided to civilize us."

Evers said nothing. This red-haired piece was intelligent, and not to be bluffed, and he was in trouble right up to his neck.

"The bulletins told," Sharr continued sweetly, "about a man named Eric Lindeman who was a Federation scientist, an astronautical engineer-designer, they called him. And how he wanted to make a star-ship go faster and farther than ever before."

Yes, Evers thought heavily. Lindeman's big dream. It had brought them all to this, all three of them. And yet, even now, he could not regret the dream and their passion for it. It had been worth while.

Long ago, man had won the stars, by the invention of the overdrive that hurled ships in a short-cut through hyper-space, thousands of times as fast as light. Out through the galaxy had spread the ships, the commerce and civilization of the Federation, to thousands of suns and worlds.

But beyond the shores of our galaxy, out across the vast ocean of outer space, glimmered other great continents of stars, other galaxies. Could a ship cross that gulf, could man win the galaxies too, if the overdrive were stepped up so that an even tighter dimensional short-cut attained speeds tens of thousands of times greater?

Lindeman was sure it could be done. It had, he pointed out, always been theoretically possible, but nobody had tried it yet. He would try it. And he had infected his assistants—Evers and Straw—with his own enthusiasm. They had eagerly laid their plans for the building of the Lindeman drive. And then, from the chief of their Bureau, had come the peremptory order to discontinue the research as "impractical and unnecessary at the present time." All appeals and arguments had been flatly rejected.

Disappointed and angry, Lindeman had quit the Bureau—and had taken Evers and Straw with him. They would build the drive. If not for the Federation. then for themselves. Lindeman had a few past patents that had brought him credits. He used them to buy a four-man express cruiser, and they three had built the Lindeman drive into it. Man was going to step out into inter-galactic space.

But he wasn't, they soon learned. From Galactic Control, the branch that governed all space travel, came a formal directive that was backed by a decision of the Council itself. No experimental

voyages outside the galaxy were permitted, now or in the near future.

"There are thousands of fringe planets in our own galaxy that need development," said the directive. "There is work for many generations along our own starways. To start a star-rush to another galaxy could fatally cripple the orderly development of our own. Permission denied."

Lindeman had had enough. His ship had the drive in it and was ready to go. He had cursed the Council, GC and all Bureaus, he had explained to Straw and Evers the penalties they would face if they violated an official directive, and then the three of them had taken off, had plunged out of the galaxy and hit for Andromeda.

And this, Evers thought bitterly, was their homecoming from that voyage. Straw was hurt, and Lindeman was hiding with him in the ship in the jungle, and he lay here trussed up like a pig with a Valloan wench gloating over him.

The girl was saying, "You made quite a stir, you know. Most people thought you'd die out there. But in case you ever *did* come back, GC had all kinds of notices out about you."

Evers said sourly, "All right, you've been clever. You spotted me and got me away from the GC man, and have me all to yourself. But what makes you think I'm worth a fortune to you?"

"To Schuyler Metals," said Sharr casually, "fifty thousand credits is just small change."

EVERS' WORST FEARS were realized. It would have been bad enough to be picked up by Galactic Control. But the real danger, ever since they came back from Andromeda, was Schuyler.

Peter Schuyler. The man who owned, lock, stock and barrel, the biggest metals corporation in the galaxy. From the first moment that he and Lindeman and Straw had made their appalling discovery at Andromeda, they had known that when they got back their lives would be worth just nothing if Schuyler got hold of them.

He said, "Then Schuyler Metals has been offering rewards for us?"

Sharr nodded her red head. "Of course. They sent agents to every fringe world where you'd be likely to land, secretly passing out pictures of you with their reward-offers." She laughed. "Half the people on Valloa would have recognized you, if I hadn't seen you first."

"It won't work," Evers said harshly. "You can't possibly get me out of here and deliver me to them, without being seen by GC

men."

"I don't have to," she assured him. "While you were unconscious, I sent them a message. They'll be along for you—with the money."

The certainty of defeat, the blasting of his last hopes, snapped Evers' temper. "Why, you thieving little tramp—"

He went on, telling her what he thought of her, using simple words of one syllable and great force.

Sharr flushed with anger and raised her hand to slice down at him in the Valloan nerve-stunning blow. Then she stopped, and shrugged.

"Go ahead," she said. "I suppose I'd feel the same way, in your place."

She went back and sat down and continued to swing one leg over the other, watching him with cool green eyes.

Evers' brain was a confusion of raging, desperate thoughts. He knew what would happen to him—to all of them—if Schuyler got hold of them. The course Schuyler would follow was crystal clear. Three men had come back from Andromeda galaxy, and they must die for having gone there.

He wished now they'd simply landed and surrendered to Galactic Control in the first place, and told their story. But that was the trouble—they might never have been given a chance to tell that story, from a GC cell or anywhere else.

Schuyler Metals had the power to reach into many places. That it swung heavy weight inside the Galactic Bureaus was now evident. The directive that had forbade them to build or try out an intergalactic ship—he was sure now that that had been inspired by Schuyler. And if Schuyler had that kind of influence, he could arrange to have them silenced fast if they surrendered. Their one chance had been to get their information secretly up to the Council through a contact, first. And the chance had failed, thanks to an alert GC patrolman and this damn girl.

A thought occurred to Evers' desperately groping mind. He didn't think it was worth much, but it was the only card he had left.

He looked up at Sharr and asked, "Why do you think Schuyler Metals is willing to pay so much for us?"

She shrugged her bare, shapely shoulders lightly. "How would I know? All I care is that they pay well. I suppose they want the secret of your ship?"

Evers shook his head. "Lindeman didn't keep his drive a secret. It was formally patented. Besides, what good is it when GC forbids

extra-glactic flight?"

Her green eyes became interested and intent. "I hadn't thought of that. Why *do* they want you so badly, then?"

"Because of something we found at Andromeda," he said.

"Something that Schuyler Metals wants?"

"No," he said. "Not that at all. Something we found there that they don't want anyone to know about."

Her brows drew together. "I don't understand that. What did you find there?"

Evers looked up at her somberly. The question took him back to that unforgettable moment, when their little ship had come out of overdrive, the long nightmare traverse through hyper-space ended, and they three had looked out wild and eager at the vast burning cloud of Andromeda's alien suns, blazing across the whole firmament.

"What will we find here?" Straw had cried. "What?"

And remembering that moment of eager anticipation, and the ironic and appalling sequel to it, Evers' voice was heavy as he answered,

"We found out something there. Something so dangerous that we're going to be killed by Schuyler just because we know it."

Sharr stared at him, and then suddenly got to her feet. "Oh, no," she said with sudden passion. "You're not going to appeal to my sympathies. I don't have any—for Earthmen."

HER GREEN EYES blazed. "So I am a thief, and the daughter of thieves. I'm also a Valloan. And what have Earthmen brought Valloa but new ways that we do not want, and teaching that is given with contempt!"

"So you don't like Earthmen," Evers said. "You like your own skin, don't you? And you're in danger, as well as I."

She stared at him unbelievingly. He went on rapidly, making his pitch for all it was worth.

"There's something going on at Andromeda that Schuyler can't allow to be known. He'll put us out of the way, to silence us. And just in case, he'll also put out of the way anyone we could have told that secret to, since we returned. That means you, Sharr."

She came over and looked down at him with narrowed eyes. "You're clever, Earthman. But you can't trick me."

"Can't I?" he said. "Think it over, Sharr. If Schuyler dares to grab three men right out of the hands of GC to shut them up, do you think he'll take any risks that a Valloan baggage might be able to talk?"

She thought it over, walking back and forth in the crystal room. She turned and shot a sudden look at him.

"I still don't believe it. But Earthmen are capable of anything. I'm turning you over for the money —but I'll take no chances."

She went to a little wooden cupboard and took out of it an energy-gun—Evers' own gun. She stood with it in her hand, looking down doubtfully at herself.

The skin-tight silken white pants and the band she wore across her breasts were a fine costume for showing off her bold, leggy beauty. But they had their drawbacks.

"I don't see where you're going to hide the gun," he gibed.

Sharr ignored him. She went back to the chair she had been sitting in, and slipped the gun under the straw cushion there.

She suddenly straightened, and Evers rolled half over and listened intently. From outside, faint above the last tinkling of the crystal chimes, came a rushing scream of sirens.

Hope flared for a moment in Evers. Better the GC patrols than what was facing him! But the sirens got even fainter, and then died away, and there was only the dying echoes of the Valloan bells.

Sharr, at a little window peering, said with satisfaction, "They went across town. They're on a wrong trail."

"Yes," said a man's flat voice from behind them. "We know. We set up the decoy to get them out of this district."

Sharr flung around to face the door, and Evers rolled over fast. He knew when he saw the two men that his pitch had failed, that it was too late now for tricks.

They were Earthmen, and they were not young. They had tough-guy written all over them in a quiet, unobtrusive way. The stocky one with the flat, brick-like face kept his hands in his pockets, and the tall, dark smiling one came forward and looked down at Evers.

"It's him," he said. "Evers. One of them."

The stocky man came forward too. He said to Evers, "Where are Lindeman and Straw?"

Evers shrugged. "At Andromeda. I came back alone."

The tall man smilingly drew back his foot for a kick, but Flat-face shook his head. "Not that way. Makes no difference anyway. They're out in the jungle somewhere, and we can soon find them. We'd better get going."

Sharr came forward and demanded, "What about my fifty thousand credits?"

"You'll get it," said Flat-face.

"I want it now!"

"Listen," said Flat-face patiently, "we do things in a certain way. The money will he paid when we have all three men. You're to come along with us, and the boss will give you your money then."

The tall smiler was hauling Evers to his feet. Evers shot Sharr a glance that had a harsh meaning in it. The Valloan girl's face hecame tight and quiet, and she went and sat down in the chair and said,

"I found your man for you and I'm not going anywhere till I get paid."

"Oh, yes, you are," said Flat-face. He started toward her. "Now listen—"

Her hand slipped down heside the cushion. Evers suddenly uttered a loud yell. It startled Flat-face and he turned irritably.

"Will you shut him up?" he snapped to his comrade. "He can't he heard in here, hut once we get outside—"

The diversion of Evers' yell had given Sharr her chance, as he had intended. She came up out of the chair like a hunting leopard, with the gun in her hand.

"I am not going anywhere and neither are you till I get my credits," she said to Flat-face as he turned hack toward her.

Flat-face hesitated, for the Valloan girl looked dangerous now. But the tall man holding Evers let go of him and grahhed inside his jacket.

Evers' hands were hound hehind him hut there was one thing he could do. He lowered his head and hutted the tall man in the stomach. The tall man cried out in pain and staggered away, humping into Flat-face. Flat-face instantly seized the opportunity to snatch for his own gun.

Evers, trying to keep his halance, yelled, "Shoot!"

Sharr did so. The nasty little heam from her gun, notched to stunner strength, hit Flat-face and his pal as they did a sort of clumsy staggering waltz together. They hoth dropped like sacks.

Evers went over to the girl, who was looking hlankly down at the two senseless men. He said grimly,

"You might as well cut me loose. You're in as much trouhle now as I am."

CHAPTER III

SHARR STARED at him, suddenly no longer a self-assured adventuress, hut a worried girl.

"You were right," she said. "They would have made me go with them. They wouldn't have paid me."

"The money means nothing to

Schuyler," Evers said. "But there's a secret that means a great deal to him, and you might have learned it. I think if he catches you you'll he as dead as I'll be *if* he catches me."

He added, "You know you can't sell me out now."

Sharr made no move. She asked, "Where will you go if I release you?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Because," she said, "I'm not safe here now. There'll be others come to see what happened to these two. They'll search everywhere. I've got to have some place to go."

Evers gave her a sour smile. "You think fast, don't you? Chase with the hounds or run with the hare. All right, I see your point. You free me and I'll promise to take you with me."

"Where?"

"To the *Phoenix,* our ship. It's out in the jungle and my friends are waiting there. We'll have to get away from Valloa fast and try some other world."

Sharr went to the cupboard and came back with a crystal knife and slashed the hide thongs around his wrists. Evers rubbed his wrists painfully.

His heart sank at the thought of going back to Lindeman and Straw and reporting his failure. But there was nothing else for it. They'd be lucky if they got away from Valloa, now. And the news that they'd returned from outer space would set a hue and cry for them wherever they went.

He took the gun out of the senseless Flat-face's pocket, stuck it in his own pocket, and went out with the girl hurrying silently after him.

The street was darker now, the River of Stars low in the black sky. And it seemed very silent, for now the nightly calling of the bells had ceased.

As he stood in the narrow, empty street between the glimmering crystal houses, trying to figure the direction, Evers heard the silence suddenly broken. A far-off keening and wailing came sweeping through the town toward him.

"That tears it!" he said. "The GC men—they found out it was a false lead, and are back to comb the town some more!"

He felt desperate. Long before they could get to the edge of town, to the jungle, the fast cars would have overtaken them. In these empty streets, he and Sharr would be spotted instantly.

But what if the streets were crowded? Evers had an idea which he would have rejected in a less desperate situation. He snatched the gun back out of his pocket.

"You people think a lot of those

bells, I've heard?" he said.

Sharr flashed him a worried, wondering look. "Yes—the bells go from father to son, for generations. But why—"

He didn't answer. On a roof a little back along the street-shimmered a great row of the conical crystal bells, deserted now that the night-music time was over. Evers notched his gun to the highest power and fired up at the row of bells.

Sharr uttered a gasp of horror and clutched at his arm. "No, do not—"

Her voice was instantly drowned in the terrific, ringing crash as his beam shattered tbe bells. Agonizing to the ears, like the falling of millions of crystal goblets on a stone floor, the big chimes seemed to utter a ringing, throbbing death-cry across the dark town.

ALMOST AT ONCE, even before the ringing dissonances had ebbed away, voices cried out and people began to run into the streets. Yells of rage came from the next block, Valloan voices rising in a tumult, all the crystal bouses disgorging their occupants to mill in tbe streets and point up at the shattered bells.

Evers already had Sharr by the wrist and was pulling her along with him, down the dark street away from the gathering uproar.

"That'll keep the GC men busy for a little while," he said. "Hurry!"

"It was sacrilege!" she cried. "The bells are older than your Earth—"

"I'll pay for them sometime if I live long enough—which is doubtful," he grunted. "Come on."

They ran on through the dark streets with the River of Stars in their faces, a magnificent cataract of light belting the sky just above the dark jungle.

When Evers hit the fields at the edge of town he skirted along them, trying to find the road of the crystal-miners by which he had entered the Valloan town. The uproar was still going on behind them, though dimmed by distance. He guessed that GC was having its hands full with the outraged Valloans.

He found the road—hardly more than a wide trail. Tbe dark jungle took them in.

He was near exhaustion. He had had too much, for too long a time, and the last few hours had about used him up. He slowed to a walk, and the Valloan girl slowed down too.

Evers, his breath pumping harshly, uttered a little laugh that had no mirth in it.

"And we thought when we start-

ed, that when we came back we'd get a heroes' welcome. Even though we broke regulations, we thought we'd be heroes—the men who went to Andromeda!"

It seemed now to him such a long and weary time ago, that take-off into the outer gulf. They had felt like Columbus, not dreaming of the appalling knowledge that was waiting for them out there across the abyss, the knowledge that had doomed them to a fateful home-coming. . .

The dark jungle got darker as the blazing River of Stars sank lower toward the horizon. The smells and sounds of this Valloan forest were alien to Evers, but he was too numb with fatigue to be sensitive to them now. He stumbled a little as he went along the trail, and he would have passed the broken limb he'd left to mark his turn-off, if Sharr had not caught his arm.

"Is this it?"

"Yes, this is it. The *Phoenix* is this way."

He forced his way through the brush, reeds smashing under his feet, with Sharr behind him. No need to worry about leaving a trail now!

He came into the little clearing, and there loomed the dark bulk of the *Phoenix*. It seemed a small ship, to have gone so far. It seemed a tired ships, its flanks crusted with the dust of undreamably far worlds.

A lethal beam flashed from the ship, ripping and scorching the brush beside them.

"Eric, for God's sake, it's me!" yelled Evers.

The beam cut off, and he heard an exclamation. He went forward, and in the square of darkness that was the airlock door of the ship he saw the darker blob that was Lindeman.

Lindeman held a gun and also, in his other hand, a torch. He let it shine briefly, and beyond its dazzle Evers saw his scrawny little form leaning tensely forward, peering.

"I wasn't expecting two to come back," Lindeman said hastily. "I—who's the girl? Did you contact Garrow?"

"No, I didn't," Evers said bitterly. "Schuyler's agents nearly had me, and they and GC are hunting me, and we'd better get off Valloa quick before they find us."

He pushed the stammering, protesting Lindeman ahead of him into the ship, slamming shut the airlock door. Inside Straw was waiting—a towering, dark young giant with an absurdly round, boyish face that gave no hint of the first-class brain behind it. His upper left arm was bandaged and his

face was still a little pale, but that did not prevent him from uttering a low whistle of appreciation when he saw Sharr.

"I can see you're feeling better," said Evers.

"Oh, sure, I'm all right," said Straw. "Who is she?"

"She's the reason I failed," Evers said. "GC has every world alerted for us, and this Valloan girl spotted me and tried to sell me to Schuyler."

Lindeman peered at her in myopic anger, his ruff of thin brown hair making him look more than ever like an enraged marmoset.

"If so, why the devil did you bring her here?"

"Had to, to get here myself," Evers told him. "Schuyler's men are after her too, now. Will you stop babbling? We've got to clear out of here fast."

HE PUSHED FORWARD into the control-room of the little ship, a crowded iron coop, and took the pilot-chair.

"But where can we *go?*" asked Lindeman, on a note of desperation.

"Anywhere that isn't Valloa will do, for a starter," Evers said. "Look, will you strap Sharr into a chair? Have you ever been in a star-ship before?"

He addressed the latter question to the Valloan girl, as Lindeman strapped her into a recoil-chair. Her green eyes were very wide as she looked at him.

"No," she said.

"Good," he grunted. "You'll catch hell when you feel overdrive for the first time. It'll pay you back for that chop on the neck."

She called him what sounded like the Valloan equivalent of a nasty name, but he was too busy with the controls to pay any heed. He had no time to waste. He set up an elementary take-off pattern, fed it into the computers, punched the generator switch, and blasted the *Phoenix* up out of the jungle in a roaring rush.

He wondered how much more the old ship could take, how much more any of them could take. It wasn't fair to ask a ship or a man to cross the ocean that lies between the galaxies, and come back again, and still have to go on and on.

Valloa fell away and Evers shifted fast into overdrive. The lights turned blue and the *Phoenix* shivered and fell a billion miles into nothingness, falling right out of the continuum into hyper-space. The starry blackness outside the windows became an evilly blurred and streaked grayness.

He set a tentative course along

the rim of the galaxy, and then sagged in the chair. Lindeman came and looked at him, and said,

"Now where? The GC will have ships out after us fast, and we're bound to be spotted soon."

"I know," said Evers.

"Then where?"

There was a little silence, except for the eery hum of the drive, and in the silence the girl Sharr sat looking from one to another of them, her face white and strained and wondering.

"We've tried to sneak back into the galaxy and get our story to the Council secretly," said Evers. "It didn't work, and it won't work, now. GC won't believe our story, and while we're trying to prove it to them, Schuyler's men will get to us and shut us up for good."

Straw said, "We could call GC on the communic and tell them our story, before we surrender to them."

Evers said wearily, "We've been over that before. The minute we use the communic we tell Schuyler's outfit where we are, and they'll be right onto us."

Lindeman pounded on the control-board in a kind of anguish. "Then what are we going to do?"

Evers had been thinking. Through his fog of exhaustion, a slow, sullen anger had been growing in him. He was tired of being hunted.

He said, "We've got to *prove* what Schuyler's doing, before we surrender to GC. Then they'll have to believe us."

He looked at the three-dimensional representation of this sector of the galaxy in the "tank." He said, "The planet Arkar, where Schuyler has his home, isn't too far from here along the Rim."

Lindeman's eyes became round and horrified. "Go to Arkar? It'd be walking right into Schuyler's hands. He *owns* that planet."

Evers nodded. "And it's the one place where he won't be expecting us to go."

"And when we get there?"

Evers said, "Schuyler must be running his secret operation from Arkar. The secret would be bound to get out if he used any of his company's ordinary bases. Only on that private world of his could he maintain secrecy. If we go there, we can maybe blast his operation wide open for the whole galaxy to see."

"How can we? Three men, against Schuyler's whole bunch there—"

Evers shrugged. "You said yourself that GC cruisers will soon spot us, and be after us. All right. We'll lead them right to Arkar, and show them what's going on there."

Lindeman said, "*If* we're still living when they get there. Schuyler would put us away fast before GC ever arrives, if we're caught."

"I know," said Evers. "That's the chance we have to take."

"I say, take it," said Straw. "To the devil with weaselling around like this."

Lindeman looked sick with worry. "It's crazy. But we've got to prove to the galaxy somehow what we found at Andromeda."

Evers got up out of the pilot chair and stood, swaying a little on his feet.

"Keep her headed for Arkar, then. GC will spot us soon enough. I've got to get some sleep or I'm through."

He started back through the control-room, as Lindeman took the pilot-chair. Sharr had got out of her chair too, and he looked at her and shook his head.

"You'd have been safer back on Valloa," he told her. "But you would come."

"I'm not afraid," she flashed. And then she asked, "What *did* you find out there at Andromeda galaxy?"

"We found the one thing we didn't expect," said Evers. "We found that we weren't the first Earthmen to reach Andromeda, after all."

She stared. "Not the first? But who was there before you?"

He said, "Schuyler and his men were there before us!"

He stumbled on back toward the cabin.

CHAPTER IV

EVERS DREAMED as the ship fled on, and in his sleep a nightmare memory and vision rose before him.

For again he seemed to be in Andromeda galaxy, their little ship forging through mighty halls and corridors of suns, on and on through that solemn vastness of space and fire and strangeness. And then they were landing upon a world, in a city. Under the orange sun it flashed and glittered, an unearthly metropolis of plastic and silvery metal, laced with slender shining cables upon which swiftly came and went forms that were not human.

Destruction had been in that city. Great scorched slashes had been torn in the alien buildings, and many of the shining cables hung broken and useless, and there was a whispering susurration in the air, a sound of grief.

A face rose before Evers, white and hairless and strange, with two enormous dark and shining eyes that were bent upon him in an accusing gaze. From the little

mouth came speech, and Evers heard the accusation and he cried out a denial.

"No, no! *We* did not slay the K'harn!"

He woke on his own yell, and he was sweating in his bunk in the little cabin of the *Phoenix*, and Sharr was bending over him, her green eyes wide and startled.

She said, "I came—you were yelling—"

"I don't doubt it," he said. He unfastened his straps and sat on the edge of his bunk, still shaking.

He looked forward toward the control-room. He could see Lindeman asleep in one chair, his monkey-like head lolling, and Straw was in the pilot-chair. They were still in overdrive.

The red-haired Valloan girl was looking down at him puzzledly, unconsciously rubbing her left ankle with her bare right foot. It was a ridiculously childish gesture for one who, in that costume, was obviously not at all a child.

"Who are the K'harn?" she asked.

Evers looked at her. "I must really have been yelling." He said, broodingly, "They're far away. They live on the outer worlds of Andromeda galaxy."

Sharr stared at him with a touch of awe in her eyes. "Then there are *people* there?"

Evers looked up at her. "I'm not sure you'd call them people. They're not human, hardly even humanoid—yet they're what the human seed might have developed into in another universe. Four-limbed, strange, but—yes, they're people. Peaceful. intelligent people, who never deserved what Schuyler brought them."

She shook her red head wonderingly. "I still can't believe—how could Schuyler and his men get to that other galaxy before you, and no one ever suspect? How long has he been going there?"

Evers thought. "As near as we can figure it out, Schuyler's task-forces have been secretly visiting Andromeda galaxy for two years. He has a lot of scientific brains in his pay. Some of them must have figured out how to speed up the overdrive, just as Lindeman did—it was always theoretically possible. With his money and facilities, it'd be quite easy for Schuyler to fit ships with the new drive and send them to Andromeda in total secrecy. To maintain that secrecy, they've been waiting to kill us when we got back."

"But why? What are they *doing* there?"

"They're stealing, that's what they're doing," Evers said grimly. "The K'harn, the inhabitants of the Andromeda fringe worlds, are

a pretty advanced folk scientifically. Their cities are rich in metals that are rare or unknown here, scientific devices developed along lines unthought of hy us, whole treasures of alien knowledge. But, as I said, the K'harn are a peaceful, cooperative folk. War and weapons they don't know about. It's been easy for Schuyler's ships, equipped with heavy weapons, to systematically loot the K'harn cities."

Sharr's eyes flashed. "Earthmen—they're all the same. Why don't they stay on their own world!"

"I'm an Earthman," Evers reminded her. "So are my friends. We're not helping Schuyler, we're trying to stop what he's doing."

He added somberly, "But I don't hlame you. The K'harn thought the same thing when we landed first on one of their worlds. Schuyler's task-force had been there months hefore. They thought we were more of the same. They tried to kill us—they did wound Straw—before we made them understand we knew nothing ahout it.

"We stayed there. The K'harn taught us their language. They were desperately anxious to find out where we came from and where Schuyler's ships came from, anxious to know if there would be any more marauders from the sky."

Evers laughed, a jarring sound. "And when in turn *we* learned from them what had happened, we couldn't believe it at first. We'd been so sure we were the first Earthmen to reach Andromeda. And we found that others had been there for a long time, looting. We went to other K'harn worlds, saw what Schuyler's men had done. It was one of their wrecked, discarded ships that told us it *was* Schuyler's men. We saw enough destruction, enough dead K'harn, to do us. We headed back home, to tell the whole galaxy what they were doing out there. But we knew we'd never get a chance to tell much unless we landed on a world like Valloa and got word secretly to the Council."

"And I trapped and hetrayed you!" cried Sharr. She said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know. I'd help you stop the evil they're doing, if I could."

Evers rose to his feet. "The only way to stop it is to drag it out for everyone to see. That's why we're going to Arkar."

HE WENT FORWARD to the control-room, Sharr trailing after him. They were still in overdrive and the windows still showed only a formless grayness streaked with crazy squiggles of light. In the tank-chart, the blip that was the *Phoenix* was crawling through a

swarm of light-flecks that were suns. Beyond this small Rim cluster was an isolated minor sun with one planet—Arkar.

Few men in the history of the galaxy had ever owned a planet. Schuyler did, legally. He had applied for a perpetual lease on Arkar. It was then an arid, lifeless globe, a desert of dust, with only crumbling stone ruins of infinite age to show that men had once lived there before their world dried and died. There was no one else who wanted the deathly place, and the lease was granted. Promptly some of the Schuyler millions had been poured into it, setting up great electronic water-synthesizers, bringing in vegetation, levelling a spaceport and building the castle that was Schuyler's home. Arkar, thus Earth-conditioned, had become a flowering, livable world—and it was Schuyler's world.

Straw looked up at him with a mirthless smile on his round face. "Your little plan is working just fine, Vance. See back there?"

Evers looked at the right-hand edge of the tank. Three blips. widely separated from each other, were crawling through the wilderness of suns. Their courses converged toward the *Phoenix*.

"GC's big radar station on Tinno must have picked us up, right away," said Straw. "We can't use the inter-galactic drive in here. They'll soon catch up to us."

Evers calculated mentally. "It's cutting things close, but we should reach Arkar at least twelve hours before them. I'll take over."

Straw got up, stretching his towering young figure and tenderly feeling his bandaged arm, as Evers took the pilot-chair.

Lindeman woke up, and looked at them with eyes still red-rimmed from fatigue and sleep. He studied the tank.

Then he shook his head. "We'll have to move fast on Arkar. And how can we, without Schuyler's toughs grabbing us the first move we make?"

"Only one thing to do," Evers said. "Arkar's a forested world now—remember those stories of the giant vegetation Schuyler grew there? Land the *Phoenix* in the forest, sneak in to his spaceport there, find his galactic-drive ships and his loot from Andromeda, and then show them to the GC men when they arrive there looking for us."

Lindeman said gloomily, "But Schuyler's radar-station will spot us when we come in."

"Sure they will. And they'll track where we land, and will come looking for our ship. But while they're finding it, *we* will be on foot making for their spaceport."

"Harebrained, but the only thing we can try," muttered Lindeman. He glanced at Sharr, standing beside the pilot-chair. "What about that Valloan wench? She'll give the show away first chance she gets."

"I will not!" said Sharr. "I did not know the thing that Schuyler is doing, before!"

"Oh, sure, now you're noble-minded and everything," said Lindeman. "My eye!"

Evers interrupted, before Sharr could retort to that. "She'll be all right. If nothing else, she knows hy now that she's in as much danger from Schuyler as we are."

Straw, grinning, took the furious girl by the arm. "Forget them, honey. Come on back and help me break out some ration-capsules."

They went aft, but within a few minutes Straw returned, ruefully rubbing his cheek. "Some right arm that baby's got!"

Evers told him, "You're lucky you haven't a broken neck. The Valloans have a kind of judo that's murder, and she knows it. Better let her alone."

Tbey took the ration capsules and the *Phoenix* droned on through the formless grayness of hyperspace. And in the great chart in the tank, the three blips that were GC cruisers crept on their trail.

Evers watched the chart, and thought. He thought their chances were no better than Lindeman's estimate. He thought that he might just have been too clever entirely in thrusting themselves right into the stronghold of their enemy. But what else could they do? A black and evil work was going on there away on the fringes of Andromeda galaxy. It would go on for years if it wasn't exposed. It was up to them to expose it, in any way, at any risk.

Evers' face hardened and he told himself, "If we can't do it any other way, I'll kill Schuyler."

He looked again and again at the tank as the hours went by. Arkar was drawing closer, and the three GC cruisers were still far back.

Lindeman and Straw hung over his chair now, studying the chart anxiously. Sharr watched the light-streaked evil grayness outside the windows with a horrified fascination. Time went by.

"We're close enough to switch out of overdrive," said Lindeman, finally.

Evers shook his head. "Not yet. I want to get in as close as we can, first."

"It's dangerous to come out of overdrive too near a planet!"

Evers did not turn but he heard Straw answer Lindeman. "Dangerous? Do you think we're good insurance risks, no matter how we

do this?"

Now very fast, in the chart, the dot that was the sun of Arkar and the smaller dot that was the planet closed toward the blip of the *Phoenix*.

"Strap in," said Evers, still without turning.

HE WAITED, his hands sweating on the switches. He hoped their instruments had not gone erratic after all they had been through. If they were only a shade off, three men and a girl would go to glory in a spectacular way.

He switched out of overdrive.

The brilliant glare of sunlight hammered through the windows, replacing the evil grayness, and the throb of the generators rose to a shriek beyond hearing, and the atoms of Evers' body shivered again from nauseating shock as they fell back through dimensions.

And the *Phoenix* was in normal space, black space with the dull-red sun blazing big ahead of them, and the greenish globe of Arkar rolling toward them on its orbit, looking up big . . .

"That tears it!" yelled Straw suddenly. "Look down there!"

Two small hornets of metal, catching the ruddy light on their sides, had swung up out of the shadow of the planet and were curving up toward them.

"I *knew* Schuyler's radar here would spot us!" Lindeman cried.

Evers ignored that, and hit the blast-switches hard. The *Phoenix* jumped at full power, heading toward the northern hemisphere of the half-shadowed planet as the two little spacers came up from under it.

"We've got a chance yet," he said rapidly. "Give me the coordinates of the spaceport here, quick!"

Lindeman punched buttons, and as the microfile of standard interstellar navigational data flashed the information, he read it off. As he heard it, Evers fed the information into the computer.

The landing-pattern he wanted sprang out before him as a graph of light on a small screen. He read it and then hit the blasts again, altering course, aiming to swing low around the northern pole of Arkar.

The planet spun under them, half in bright light, half in shadow. Their goal was on the shadowed half, and that was good if they could make it. He thought they could beat those two metal hornets in by a few seconds.

He thought wrong. Blinding flares exploded silently in space right around them. The instrument-panel went *Click!* and Sharr cried out and put her hand to her dazzled eyes.

Lindeman said, in a tone of wonder, "They're firing energy-shells. No private ship in the galaxy is allowed to carry weapons that size."

Evers said harshly, "A lot that would worry a man who's robbing whole worlds. Their men on Valloa must have sent them word about us. Better hold on."

He didn't look to see if they obeyed. There would be another burst of energy-shells in a moment, and he had plenty to do.

He hit the blast-buttons like a man gone insane, sending the *Phoenix* down in a corkscrew, crazy course toward the shadowed forests on the night side of Arkar. Evers was an astronautical engineer and a good pilot. But the men in those metal hornets were not just good, they were expert. They hung right after him and they fired again.

Evers, leveling out and suddenly changing course, saw blinding light and heard the crash of severed metal and smelled super-hot air.

"Grazed our tail!" Straw yelled. "Set her down!"

It was that or nothing, for the *Phoenix* was falling out of control. Evers set her down, fast and hard. They crashed down through houghs and leaves and smacked solid ground, and then the wounded ship rolled over and over through the forest.

CHAPTER V

STRAPPED in their chairs, they went round and round with the rolling ship, feeling the impact each time it crashed over one of the smaller trees. Then it hit something entirely too hig to crush, something that stopped it with an authoritative *whack*, and for a moment Evers saw stars.

He shook his head to clear it. Everything was quiet and still now. He hung in the chair-straps at a sixty-degree angle, the floor of the ship being now its upper wall.

"Everybody okay?" he asked. Their voices answered shakenly in the dark, one by one. "Wait till I get down and I'll help you down, Straw," he said.

They presently stood on the slippery curved wall that had become the floor. A big rent had been torn open in the hull aft, and a faint ray of starlight came through it to show them the splintered beams, the torn and crumpled walls, and each other's white faces.

He saw a glimmer of wetness in Lindeman's eyes as he stared woefully around. "She'll never fly again," said Lindeman.

Evers didn't blame him for be-

ing near to tears. It was hard on a man to cherish a dream for half a lifetime, and then have it end like this. To dream of being the Columbus of a new galaxy, to put everything you had into it, to dare all risks—and then to find you were not and never would be the first discoverer, and to come back and end your voyaging like this . . .

"The devil with that now," said Evers, purposefully harsh. "*We* won't go anywhere again either, unless we get out of here fast."

As though to emphasize his words, there came from somewhere overhead the muffled, ripping B-R-ROOM—BOOM! of a ship going fast.

"They're landing!" exclaimed Straw.

"No, not in this tangle of trees," Evers said. "But they'll keep buzzing the spot where we crashed, while they call Schuyler. We'll have men here fast. Step on it!"

He shoved Lindeman and then Sharr and Straw out through the rent in the hull. He paused himself to snatch up a trio of energy-pistols, pawing for them in a buckled locker till he found them.

He squeezed out of the opening in the hull and dropped three feet to the ground, and stared around the warm, humid darkness.

Arkar had no moon and only a little starlight filtered down through the mighty branches overhead. For the *Phoenix,* in its rolling, had fetched up against a cluster of trunks like those of a mighty banyan, the immense branches and foliage a hundred feet over their heads. The ship had broken its back against those massive trunks.

"Smells like lilacs, somehow," murmured Straw, and Evers instantly recognized the hauntingly sweet fragrance in the air.

"That's what it is," said Lindeman, nodding toward the colossal tree.

"Lilacs? You crazy? Why—"

Lindeman said, "Schuyler planted Arkar with Earth-plants, that in this chemically different soil went into giantism. The telenews had a lot about it at the time. The big man had to have the biggest flowers—damn him."

"Will you stop chattering and move!" Evers said frantically. He grabbed Sharr's wrist and started with her away from the wrecked ship. Lindeman and Straw followed.

The roar of the unseen hornet-ship as it went over above the lofty branches quickened them. When they were out of the shade of the giant lilac, Evers swiftly studied the stars. He remembered their bearings before the crash, and he thought he knew the direction in which Schuyler's private spaceport lay.

He passed out the guns he had grabbed up, to Sharr and Lindeman and Straw. The guns, he thought poignantly, that they had taken with them to guard against the dangers of Andromeda.

"We haven't got much time," he said. "Those pilots would call the minute we crashed—there'll be men on their way here from Schuyler's base right now."

"But then if we go toward the base, we'll run right into them!" Sharr objected, and Straw said, "She's right, Vance."

Evers said furiously, "Do you suppose I don't know that? It's why we've got to hurry if we're to have any chance."

HE PRESSED forward, leading the way. Almost at once they were in a thicket of ten-foot canes, growing so closely together that they sometimes had to squeeze between them. With a shock, Evers suddenly realized that the tall canes were in fact ordinary Earth grass. Everything here was Earth vegetation, gone into giantism. Arkar's own native vegetation had long ago died for lack of water, and it had been Schuyler's whim, when he had the planet seeded after giving it water, to bring all the seeds from Earth.

Evers searched the obscurity ahead for more trees. He didn't think they had very much time. He did not know how far ahead Schuyler's mansion and spaceport were, but it could not be very far.

A heavy perfume drifted to him on the moist air, from the right. He altered course in that direction. A grove of sixty-foot trees, stiff and angular with trunks thickly studded with foot-long spikes, loomed up before him.

Straw sniffed the air and whispered, "I'll be damned, they're roses."

"We're climbing this one," Evers said rapidly. "If we're lucky, they'll go under us. You and Sharr first, Eric. I'll help Straw get up."

The climb should have been easy. The spikes were fairly close together and formed a good ladder all around the great trunk. Lindeman disappeared up in the darkness, and Sharr followed him up like a cat. But Straw had heavy going with one arm half-useless, and Evers had to climb beside him to steady him.

They reached a crotch, twenty feet from the ground. It was big enough to hold them if they squeezed together. Not daring now to speak, Evers made a gesture, and they crouched down.

He could feel Sharr warm beside him. She was not trembling, but the rapid pounding of her heart was right against him. He was afraid of her losing her nerve

and patted her hand encouragingly. She made a small sound like a sniff of resentment.

The drowsing, heavy tide of perfume flowed down on them from above and he could glimpse the outline of the giant blooms up there, against the starry sky.

Sharr stiffened against him. Her ears had been quicker than his. It was moments later before he heard the sound of men coming.

Evers peered down. The men were not trying to be utterly silent, but neither were they making any unnecessary noise. They were strung in a line, ten feet apart, and advanced in the direction where the wreck lay, turning their porta-lights this way and that.

They moved fast, and went past the clump of giant rose-trees in a minute. Evers waited till their lights were out of sight, and then whispered,

"When they find the wreck and us not in it, they'll spread out fast. Hurry!"

They pressed forward, and came to a clearing in the giant vegetation. Lindeman tripped on a loose stone, and then Evers saw that around them were low, ancient, crumbling walls of dark stone, eaten down by time so that only broken bits of them remained. He knew these were some of the remnants of the long-perished people of ancient Arkar, pathetic shards of a folk gone ages ago. But he had no time to feel that pathos, he felt too naked and exposed in this clear place, and pushed the others forward.

Ten minutes later the four of them crouched in the deep shadow of big, bushy, fronded trees that Evers thought might be peonies, and looked out into an open space.

Here was the real nerve-center of a vast industrial empire. Far across the galaxy stretched the great mines and smelters and spaceports of Schuyler Metals. But here, on this privately owned planet, was the home of the man who *was* Schuyler Metals. The fabulous mansion itself was not in sight. But this was the spaceport that served it.

It was too big, this spaceport. Far too big for a few private yachts. It had docks for a score of ships, with aprons and cranes and work-pits. In five of the docks, star-ships loomed up into the night, and they too were far too big for mere private use. Between the docks and the four fugitives, large metal warehouses glinted dully in the light of suspended krypton-arcs.

Sounds of activity came to them from the far side of the docks. Some of them were the ordinary sounds of men working with tools

and machines around ships. But there were other, heavier, clanking sounds that Evers didn't like. He hoped Schuyler had no Workers here. Men they might be able to face, but Workers were another matter.

"You were right, Evers," whispered Lindeman. "He's running the Andromeda operation from here. Those warehouses—"

EVERS LOOKED at his watch and calculated swiftly. "It'll be at least twelve hours before those GC cruisers following us get here," he said. "If we can get into the warehouses, we can hide till then. When the GC cruisers arrive, we'll surrender to them—and show them Schuyler's loot and special ships!"

"That should give them all the proof they want," muttered Straw. "All right, let's get at it."

Sharr said suddenly, "No, wait."

"Wait? For what?"

The Valloan girl, lying flat beside them, had been searching the edges of the compound with her eyes. Now she pointed.

"See the shrubs planted here and there around the edge? Why should they be planted there? There's a little metal post inside that one clump—I can just glimpse it."

Evers understood, and turned a little cold. He said, "Detectors?"

She nodded her red head. "I think a hidden network of beams around the whole compound."

Straw swore softly. "Never thought of that. Say, this wench's being from that thieves' world comes in handy."

Sharr bristled up at that, turning her head with her green eyes flaring, but Evers hastily pressed her arm.

"Shut up, Straw. We've got to figure how to get through the beam."

He couldn't think of any way. Sharr whispered that the beam would surely be too high and too deep to leap over or dig under. Their whispered conference was interrupted by the distant roar of a motor.

A half-trac loaded with men, its headlights flaring, was racing across the compound in their general direction.

"Oh, oh—they've found the *Phoenix* empty and have called back for more searchers," said Straw.

"They'll have to go out through the beam," Evers said rapidly. "Here's our chance. Be ready to jump when that trac crosses the line."

His idea was simple, but he thought it would work. When the half-trac crossed the detector beam, the alarms would register auto-

matically—unless they lifted the beam for a moment. In either case, it was the one moment when they themselves could cross without arousing notice.

The half-trac, avoiding the clump of peony-trees in which they crouched, reached the edge of the compound a few hundred yards from them. As it cut across invisible beams, loud bells rang clangorously somewhere back on the spaceport. The iron clangor ceased a moment later, as the half-trac plunged on out into the forest.

But during that moment of clangoring alarms, Evers and his three companions had plunged across the invisible barrier. They ran low through the dim starlight toward the shadow of the nearest warehouse, and crouched against the cool metal wall.

Evers, looking along the wall, said, "No doors this side. I want a look in here. We'll look in all these warehouses till we find what we're after."

"Yeah," said Straw. "Well, having Starr along will help us. You know the saying, Set a thief—"

In a hissing whisper, Sharr said to Evers, "I will stun this man if he calls me more names."

"He's only kidding rough," Evers said hastily. "Anyway, I know that on Valloa the hereditary profession of thief is no disgrace."

"It is not, but when an Earthman says it, it is different!"

"Why the devil did you have to get her going?" Evers demanded of Straw. "Is this any time for your brand of teasing? Eric—"

But Lindeman was not beside them. The little scientist had crept away around the corner of the warehouse.

They followed hastily, holding their guns. They found Lindeman beside the warehouse door.

"Locked," he said.

"I could blast the lock but it'd be noisy," Evers said. "Do you think you can open it, Sharr?"

"I will not for Earthmen who laugh at thieves," she said sulkily.

He took her by her bare shoulders and spoke to her, his voice an earnest whisper. "We look on such things differently on Earth, and you must not mind what Straw said. This is our only chance, Sharr."

She was silent, and then she said, "I'll try."

From inside the belt of her silken pants she took two delicate steel probes, as thin as wires. In the darkness, her fingers explored the heavy lock and then she crouched close to it and began to work.

THEY WAITED, not happy about waiting, with a coming and going of half-tracs audible far

across the compound. Evers thought it was lucky that the search in the forest seemed to have pulled everyone away from the warehouse area, but he didn't think their luck would go on much longer.

Sometbing clicked in the lock, and Sbarr drew hack. She said triumphantly, "There were alarm-wires in it—but I shorted them before I opened the lock."

"You're wonderful," he told her, and meant it. He slid the door open a little more than a foot, and they went quickly inside.

Lindeman's pocket torcb sent its little beam angling around the dark interior. He uttered an exclamation.

"This stuff is from Andromeda, all right—look at those things! Plastic and metal bonded togetber, just like tbe things we saw in that K'harn city."

He was swinging the beam around and it illuminated the strange tangle of objects that half-filled tbe warehouse.

These instruments and machines were unearthly and looked it, the product of a technology and a psychology utterly alien to this galaxy. Silvery metal disks hung suspended in an oval plastic framework, in one incomprehensible gadget. Next to it towered an eight-foot-higb cluster of diverging metal rods that sprang from a cage-like metal hase, the base heing linked by thick ribbons of a darker metal to a black cube. There was a thing of crystal spberes grouped around a larger sphere that looked almost like an enormous toy. Yes, tbey had seen objects like these in the faraway alien cities of the K'harn.

Evers felt staggered by the sheer magnitude of Schuyler's depredations. Here was a plundered science brought home from the farthest shores of space, from worlds that were old when Earth was still savage. He bad seen some of those robbed worlds, and he thought of the sum of agony that these things had cost.

"Wait till GC gets here and we show them *this* stuff!" crowed Straw. "It's proof enough to cook Schuyler for—"

Evers suddenly motioned Lindeman to snap out his torch, and ran to the closed door and laid his ear against it. "Listen!"

In the sudden silence, he heard trac-cars roaring past the warehouse. One of the cars pulled up and then he heard voices, loud and urgent.

"Check every warebouse! They're not out in the forest and the boss says they must be bere or in the docks!"

Startlingly loud outside tbe door at which Evers listened, came an-

other voice. "Hey, Alden, look here! This lock's been tampered with—"

Evers jumped back as the door slid suddenly open. A man, with a heavy pistol in his hand, appeared in the opening silhouetted against the glimmer of starshine outside.

Instantly, Evers notched his gun to stunner strength and shot. His beam dropped the man in a huddled heap.

Outside, the first voice yelled, "They're in there—get them!"

There was a rush of feet.

"Stunner-power!" Evers exclaimed. "We'll have enough explaining to do for GC without dead men."

Four or five men piled through the doorway in a rush. They hadn't a chance, coming into the dark interior of the warehouse against the light outside. The beams of tbe three men and Sharr dropped them before they could shoot.

More half-tracs were roaring up and stopping outside. Then the loud voice called.

"Lindeman! Come out with your hands empty and you won't be hurt! You and Straw and Evers baven't got a chance!"

Evers shouted back. "Next time, it'll be lethal beams—better stay out!"

He whispered to the others then, "If we could hold them till the GC ships come, we'd be all right."

"Yeah," said Straw, without conviction. "Twelve hours, maybe. We'd be all right if we can do that."

Time went by, and more half-tracs came, and they waited in the dark Then they heard that same voice outside, not too far from the open door.

"Don't go any nearer, Mr. Schuyler—they might make a rush out."

A hard, flat voice answered him. "What the devil's the matter with you, Alden? We haven't got all night. Get a Worker over here and use it."

Lindeman started to move forward. "It's Schuyler. I'm going out there and get him. I saw those Andromeda worlds, I—"

He was almost babbling in his shaking rage. Evers caught him and held him back. "Don't be a fool, our only chance is to wait them out."

"What is a Worker?" Sharr asked worriedly.

Evers said, "The Workers are the big remote-controlled robots used for heavy jobs. Schuyler used some of them, fitted up with destruction-beams, out there at Andromeda, from what we heard. I was afraid he'd have some of them here."

He made up bis mind. "Listen, Sharr, they don't know you're here with us. They'd never guess that you, who tried to sell me to them, would jump Valloa with us. You hide back in the loot here. When it's over, wait till GC gets here and then if you get a chance, tell the GC men about everything."

"I won't hide!" she said instantly. "Earthmen may think Valloans are thieves, but nobody ever thought us cowards!"

"I know you're not afraid," be said. "But it won't help if Schuyler gets you too. And you *can* help us by hiding till you can tell GC the truth."

She was silent, and now they could hear a steely, thumping sound outside, an odd hut regular rhythm, getting closer and louder.

"All right," Sharr finally said, reluctantly, and slipped back into the darkness.

They waited. The steely sound was now a heavy, measured clanking outside the door.

The half-open warehouse door suddenly opened wide, and in it there loomed up the towering silhouette of a Worker.

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS MORE awesome than any man. It was a colossus of hlue metal, shaped like an upright cylinder with rounded top, towering up fifteen feet on its metal legs. It came through the high warehouse door on those legs, stepping fast with a mechanical precision, the big bulk of it poised surely by the gyroscopic stabilizers inside it, the long metal arms that ended in specialized pincer-tools held rigidly at its sides. The striding legs could take the thing over rougb rubble and terrain tbat no wheeled vehicle could cross. It had no mechanical vision, no lens-eyes, but it had a built-in radar far more sensitive and precise than vision.

These powerful remote-controlled machines had been designed for heavy toil. Schuyler had found another use for them. He had had them fitted with high-power destruction-beams, that could be flashed from two eye-like apertures high in the cylinder. And he had sent such deadly altered Workers witb his looters to Andromeda. Evers had heard from the K'harn ahout the stalking metal terrors and wbat they had done.

Evers expected the destroying beams to stab toward them as the Worker entered. But they did not. Instead, the metal colossus came striding in toward them, raising its great arms.

"Three beams together might hurn through a leg and bring it down," Evers wbispered. "The left

leg at the joint, full strength. Now!"

Their weapons flashed and the three beams converged on the joint of the massive metal limb.

They had no effect whatever on the tough metal. Next instant, with a ponderous agility, the thing sprang in with great pincer-like hands reaching.

They darted back from it, scattering. It stood, as though contemplating them, immobile but infinitely threatening. It was impossible to remember that it was a machine actuated by the control of someone outside, impossible to think of it as other than alive.

Evers, crouched ready to move and hoping for a shot at a vital part of the thing, heard a voice outside saying,

"I can cut them down fast with the beams!"

And he heard Schuyler's flat voice answering commandingly, "No! No beams. It must look as though they crashed and were killed in their ship."

The Worker sprang again, this time at Straw.

Straw fired, and his delaying to do so was fatal. His beam splashed harmlessly off the big cylinder. The great pincer-hand swung with blurring speed toward him. Unable to draw back in time, Straw tried to duck the metal hand, and it struck the side of his head and knocked him into a tumbled heap.

Lindeman screeched in pure anger and ran in at the Worker, firing. The metal arm that had just felled Straw instantly darted and encircled Lindeman's small figure, pressing him helpless against the cylinder. And, holding Lindeman, the Worker leaped toward Evers.

Evers, possessed by a cold rage, had no intention of attacking the Worker. Such attack had been proved futile. It seemed to him that they were done for and his only wish now was to take Schuyler with them.

He plunged past the Worker, heading for the doorway and the man outside whom he wanted to kill.

He almost made it. He was at the door, his gun raised, when he heard the rush of clanking feet right behind him and the Worker's metal arm flashed around him and gripped crushingly. He was drawn against the cold metal side, his arms pinioned, his bones cracking.

"Got them!" said a voice outside, and then the men out there came in.

Strangled in that iron embrace, Evers hung helpless and looked down at them.

THERE WAS a man in the front of the group who was dressed in a rich, shimmering blue coverall.

He was a tall man, who had run a little to fat. You didn't notice that at first because his face held you. It was plump with good living, but there was nothing soft about it. It was the face of an emperor who has had power so long that people are no longer people to him, but creatures to be given their orders. His eyes had no pity in them as he surveyed Evers and Lindeman, only a certain resentment.

"You've made a lot of trouble," he said in that hard, flat voice. "Too bad for you you had to go where you weren't wanted."

Lindeman said, "Schuyler." He said other things, and his voice shook, and Schuyler paid no attention at all but turned impatiently to the bald, lean, hard-bitten man beside him.

"Take them back out to their ship, Alden. You know what to do. Remember, it must absolutely look to GC as though they died in the crash."

Alden, the bald man, nodded curtly. "Yes, Mr. Schuyler. The Worker can take these two out—it's safer."

One of the other men had gone and was bending over Straw. He said, "This one's dead. Whole skull crushed in."

Lindeman, his face pale and tragic, looked at Evers. And Evers thought of how brief a man's obituary could be. All the things that Straw had done, the dreams he had dreamed and the things he had laughed at, and all of a sudden it was all wrapped up and put away forever with the three words, "*This one's dead.*"

"All right, bring him along," Alden said impatiently.

There was another man with a small control-box slung on his chest. It had many buttons on it and he played upon them as expertly as an accordionist. In answer to his playing, the Worker turned ponderously.

Evers did not struggle as the Worker started out through the door with them. You could not struggle against that iron grip, and anyway the sooner they all left the warehouse, the less likely was Sharr to be discovered.

It wasn't only that he felt sorry for the Valloan girl who had unwisely stepped into a game too big and deadly for her. He still had a bitter hope—not for themselves, they were all through, but a hope that Sharr might keep hidden till the GC cruisers came. If she could, Schuyler might still be exposed, even though he and Lindeman were dead.

But Lindeman struggled. Straw's death had stunned him to silence for a moment but now as they

were carried out, the little scientist raged back at Schuyler.

"You won't get away with it forever, Schuyler! Sooner or later, someone else will go to Andromeda and the K'harn will tell them what they told us, and you'll be all through."

Evers desperately wished that Lindeman would shut up. Talk would do no good now, and might only get Sharr discovered. But Lindeman had reached the end of all self-control.

"All the dead out there, all the agony you've caused, you'll pay for it, Schuyler, when—"

Schuyler's voice cut across Lindeman's raging. "Hold it," he said sharply.

He spoke to the man controlling the Worker, for the Worker holding Evers and Lindeman suddenly stopped its clanking stride just outside the warehouse.

Schuyler came and looked up at the two captives. It seemed to Evers that there was an alert new expression on Schuyler's face.

Schuyler said, "You say the K'harn *told* you what we'd done there? How could you understand their language?"

"We understood them," Lindeman shouted. "We learned their language well enough to understand everything they told us of what you'd done there, damn you!"

Evers saw that Schuyler was paying no attention to the rest of Lindeman's furious maledictions. The magnate seemed to be thinking fast and hard, looking up at the two of them.

He said suddenly to Alden, "Plans are changed. Take these two to the house."

Alden hesitated. "But the warning we got about GC ships coming here after them! When they don't find any bodies in that wreck, they'll start searching here for these three."

AN UNEASY STIR ran through the men grouped around them in the starlight. It was obvious that the last thing they wanted was for GC to start investigating on Arkar.

"That's easily taken care of," snapped Schuyler. "Put the dead one in the wreck, fuse the fuel-hunkers, and blow it up. Make it look as though their ship blew when they crashed."

Alden's face cleared in relief. "Yes. Yes, that should do it."

The man controlling the Worker touched his controls. The iron grip suddenly relaxed, dropping Evers and Lindeman to the ground.

When Evers scramhled to his feet, it was to find that he faced the guns of two tough-faced men, who stood carefully covering him and Lindeman.

Schuyler turned away, saying over his shoulder, "I don't want these two hurt. Bring them along to the house."

He got into a car and was driven away. One of the tough-faced men motioned Evers and Lindeman toward another car.

Evers looked back, as they went. Straw's body had been carried out, and was being put in the back of a half-trac. The warehouse door was being locked again. He thought that Sharr was safe for the time being. She would surely be able to pick the lock again and get out when the GC ships arrived.

Evers and Lindeman got into the back seat of the car, and the two tough-faced men got into the front. One of the men drove and the other sat turned around, his gun covering the two prisoners. The car darted away across the spaceport. Through the window, Evers saw the half-trac hurrying away toward the forest.

Goodbye, Straw. . . .

Their car went fast under the flaring krypton lights, past the docks. There was activity around the star-ships there—men hurrying, a couple of towering Workers clanking away with heavy loads, whistles and orders sounding from back in the dark. They raced past a Communic building with tall masts and radar-installations. Trees were ahead now—trees that were flowers of old Earth grown to incredible size on this chemically different planet. The car sped down a narrow road between daisies as tall as eucalyptus trees, scarlet poppies with blooms like great bowls, dandelion shrubbery that was ten feet high.

Evers was trying to figure it all out, and couldn't. Why had Schuyler suddenly countermanded the order for their killing? He wanted something from them, that went without saying, but what?

The house loomed at the end of the road, bowered in gigantic peonies, roses, lilies, softly illuminated by concealed outside floodlights, as though Schuyler was proud of his house and wanted to see it by day and by night. Evers thought he had reason to be proud.

The greatest metals magnate in the galaxy had built of metal, boldly and imaginatively. The main mass of the house, curved and domed of roof, was of sheening chrome-steel, or a metal that looked like it. The heaviness of its mass was counterbalanced hy dainty, fairy-like towers that rose smoothly from its sides, high enough to brush the giant flowers all around. The house could have been grotesque, but it was not. It was a dream of unreal beauty.

They got out of the car and the

Earthmen with guns walked well behind them as they went up the wide copper steps. They went into a gleaming hallway, and then into a big room whose walls were all of tawny bronze, warm and welcoming, its casual furniture giving it an air of graciousness and comfort that Evers found not at all reassuring at this moment.

Schuyler was sitting down behind a desk. He motioned to chairs beside a little table. There was a bottle and glasses on the table.

"Have a drink," said Schuyler. "You look as though you could use it."

Lindeman paid no heed, but sat down and put his face in his hands. He said Straw's name in a whisper.

Evers reached for the bottle. He didn't think that refusing would hurt Schuyler any, and he did need the drink. He poured and drank a big one. As he sat the glass down he saw, back against the bronze wall, the two tough-faced men with the guns standing and watching them.

Schuyler said incisively, "It must be obvious to you that you've been spared because you can be useful to me."

They said nothing, but Lindeman raised his head and looked at Schuyler with a weary hate. Schuyler got the look, and his plump face hardened slightly.

"Let's understand each other," he said. "You consider me a ruthless monster. I consider you fools. But we can deal. I can give you something you want—your lives."

"And what do you want from us in exchange?" Evers demanded.

"Help," said Schuyler promptly. "Help in dealing with a certain problem in our Andromeda operation."

LINDEMAN STARTED to speak and Schuyler said boredly, "Spare me your moral indignation. To me, what you call moral laws are just rules that other men have laid down. I play it all by my own rules."

He went on, tapping with a gold pencil on the desk. "Two years ago, I first went to Andromeda. It was obvious that someone would go there soon, the inter-galactic drive was possible at any time. I decided to get there first without telling anyone, and see what I could pick up before the rush started. I was looking for rare metals. I found a lot more than that. I found the K'harn and their alien science. The value of that totally different science, its instruments and potentialities, was obvious."

Evers nodded. "So you robbed them and killed those of them who objected."

Schuyler shrugged. "Only when

they tried resistance. Unfortunately for them, they hadn't developed any war-weapons. Since that first trip, I've had cruisers working the fringe worlds of Andromeda, bringing back instruments of K'harn science that *could* be invaluable. The trouble is that they're so alien in concept, my own technicians don't understand them. It may take years for them to puzzle out those gadgets."

He paused, then told Evers and Lindeman, "You say you learned the K'harn language. You must have spent a good bit of time with the K'harn, to do that."

Evers thought he understood now. "We did," he said. "They accepted us as friends, when they found we weren't part of your outfit. But we do *not* know how to operate or explain K'harn scientific instruments, so I think you're wasting your time."

Schuyler smiled slightly. "I seldom waste my time. You're under a misapprehension. It's your ability to speak the K'harn language that interests me."

Evers stared, puzzled. "Why?"

Schuyler said, "When I found my technicians weren't getting anywhere on those gadgets, I gave orders for my men out there to bring back a couple of K'harn scientists who could explain all that stuff to us. Two scientists of the K'harn were captured and brought here, but one unwisely attempted an escape and was killed. The other is still here, but he's uncooperative and refuses even to speak to us. We don't know his language, yet it's essential that we get him to cooperate."

Lindeman slowly began to rise to his feet, staring at Schuyler in absolute unbelief as the magnate went on.

"If you know the K'harn language, you can talk to him. Tell him my proposition—that as soon as he's explained all the machines to my technicians, he'll be returned to Andromeda. Emphasize to him that—"

It was as far as Schuyler got. Lindeman's hoarse voice interrupted him, saying,

"So it wasn't enough for your filthy greed to rob and kill out there, you had to bring two of them here prisoners. Why, you—"

He plunged toward Schuyler's desk. Evers jumped up but before he could take a step, one of the tough-faced men had fired. The pallid beam from his gun dropped Lindeman like a heap of old clothes.

"You move and you get it too," said the tough-faced man.

Schuyler said bitingly to the man, "Couldn't you have grabbed him? There was no need to stun him, you fool."

The man looked uncomfortable. "I thought—"

"Blockheads trying to think make most of my troubles," said Schuyler. "Take him down to one of the lower rooms and let him sleep it off."

The man hastily lifted Lindeman as tbough he were a mannikin and toted him out. The other tough-faced man remained, his gun in full evidence.

Schuyler turned his gaze back to Evers, who stood with fists tightly clenched. He said, "Your friend will be all right in an hour or so. Now what about my proposition—will you talk to this K'harn?"

"If I do—what?" asked Evers.

"You stay living," said Schuyler promptly. "I keep my promises. You won't leave Arkar, but neither of you will be killed or harmed."

Evers thought about it, mastering his fury. He had no intention whatever of helping Schuyler but he tbought himself justified in fighting the devil with fire. If he could stall till the GC ships reached Arkar. . .

He said slowly, "I'll talk to him. I'll tell him what you say. But I won't advise him to accept your proposition. That's up to him."

"You have nice scruples," said Schuyler ironically. "You can also tell him that there are many ways of making people—even not-human people—talk, if we have to use them." He looked at the man with the gun. "All right, put him in with the K'harn."

The man who had taken Lindeman away returned. The two men shepherded Evers out of the bronze room, and along gleaming metal corridors to a stairway. They walked behind him, their guns out.

The stairway went down two levels hefore it ended in another corridor. There were two doors on each side of the short corridor, and each of the doors had a heavy combination-lock.

"Listen," said Evers to the men, "you know that GC is on its way here right now, don't you?"

One of the men said simply, "Shut up."

Evers shut up. He knew when a thing was no use, and it was no use now.

He was halted in front of one of the doors. One of the men went to it and started turning the combination-lock. The other man stood hehind Evers, his gun levelled.

The door was suddenly swung open by the man who had unlocked it. The man behind Evers shoved him powerfully at the same moment. Evers plunged forward, into a narrow metal cell. The door slammed shut behind him.

As Evers picked himself up he heard a movement in the corner of

the cell. There, in the shadows, the K'harn stood watching him.

Weird child of another universe, this crouching, spidery shape—yet familiar to Evers' eyes. The semi-human torso, the four powerful limbs that were neither arms nor legs yet were both, the fourfingered hands or feet, the white, hairless face and great dark eyes. . .

Evers started forward, and then as he opened his mouth to speak, the spidery figure rushed forward and he went down again, with alien hands upon his throat.

CHAPTER VII

EVERS ROLLED on the floor of the cell, frantically trying to break the grip of his unhuman attacker. But two of the K'harn's limbs pinioned his arms, and the other two hands were at his throat, strangling him. The big dark eyes blazed with a deadly rage, only inches from his own.

He could not breathe and he could not speak and the edges of things were beginning to darken. Evers knew he would be dead in a minute unless he broke that grip. His legs were free, and he brought his knees up in a battering smash at the weird torso.

The K'harn grunted, and the grip of his limbs on Evers relaxed for a brief second. Evers used his doubled-up legs as a lever, put all his strength into them, and thrust his spidery antagonist clear off him.

Instantly, with incredible quickness, the K'harn flashed in toward him again.

"Wait!" choked Evers in the K'harn language. "Friend—I—"

The terrible grip was on him again before he could say more, and he had done all he could and it wasn't enough.

But the K'harn paused, holding him. His blazing eyes searched Evers' face, and for the moment he did not tighten his grip.

That strange face so close to Evers, white and hairless, the eyes enormous, the nose rudimentary and the mouth small and lipless, was like a gargoyle-mask glaring down at him. Then the K'harn spoke for the first time, in his oddly-aspirated language.

"Where did you learn our speech?" he hissed. "Are there others of the K'harn prisoned here now?"

Evers could hardly speak at all with the hold still on his throat, but he forced out the syllables of that alien tongue in a husky whisper.

"I am a prisoner like yourself. There are no other K'harn here. I learned your speech from your own folk. I have stood on the

worlds of Lah and Ameramm and Ky."

The great, flaming eyes searched his face. "Ky?" whispered the K'harn. "You have heen there?"

"I was there, and I saw the destruction and death that had been dealt there hy the evil ones of my own race," said Evers. "I and my two friends learned your language there, in the looted House of Knowledge."

"What name has the Master of the House of Knowledge on Ky?" demanded the other.

Evers searched his memory frantically, and then said, "Janja is his name."

For the first time, the grip relaxed. The K'harn drew hack a little. He stood facing Evers, and there was still a menace in the tenseness of his four limhs, the poise of his head, the glare in his eyes.

"Yes," he whispered. "That is his name. You could not have learned that had you heen of the looters. For they only stayed long enough to kill, to seize the instruments of Knowledge, and to take them away and with them, two of us lesser Masters."

Evers hegan to realize that this K'harn was half-mad, and he did not wonder at it. To see their peaceful city shattered hy the sudden erruption of Schuyler's ships from the sky, to have death strike from unfamiliar weapons, to he captured and hrought on the nightmare traverse hetween galaxies, to be prisoned and questioned and threatened for weeks, mayhe months—he thought he would have gone crazy himself.

"The men who hold us here are my enemies as they are yours," Evers told him. He hegan to talk more rapidly, hesitating often as he tried to rememher the unfamiliar phrases, telling how he and Lindeman and Straw had gone to Andromeda and of the terrihle surprise that had awaited them on the fringe worlds there. He concluded, "We came hack to stop what they are doing to your worlds. My people, our government, would stop it if they knew. But we had to prove it, and in trying we were discovered, and one of my friends is dead and one is senseless and I am in this cell with you."

The K'harn had listened with feverish attention, and some of the tenseness and menace went out of his attitude. He hegan to walk hack and forth in the narrow cell—the swift, gliding spidery walk of his race.

"And the evil goes on and the worlds of my people are ravaged, and I can do nothing!" he said. "If I had heen slain like Oll, it would have heen hetter. I thought you

one of my enemies, and attacked you so that I *would* be slain."

Evers said, "Oll? Schuyler said that he'd captured two of you K'harn scientists—and that one was killed trying to escape—"

THE K'HARN SAID, "That was Oll. I am Rrulu of Ky. We two were taken when they looted the House of Knowledge. They have kept me here—how long? They have tried to make me speak, and I would not."

Evers nodded. "They want you to explain the workings of the instruments of Knowledge."

"I guessed that," said Rrulu. "I will die before I speak or tell them anything. They are murderers."

Evers had learned enough of the K'harn temperament to understand the peculiar loathing that Rrulu put into that last word. The culture of the K'harn was a purely pacific one. Developing on the fringe worlds of Andromeda with no enemies and no lack of resources to cause fight between themselves, they had become a people to whom violence was a grotesque and horrible thing.

"We have never killed," said Rrulu. "We thought that only beasts killed. And that was our weakness, when the robbers came. But we shall learn to kill!"

He came closer to Evers. The only light in the little cell was from one tiny bulb in the high ceiling, but it was light enough to show the terrible resolve on that unhuman face.

"I have thought much in the time I have been here," said Rrulu. "In the past, we have only created. But the instruments that create can be altered so that they will destroy. If I ever get back to my people—"

He stopped, and Evers saw the hopelessness that came into his strange eyes.

"You *can* get back, Rrulu!" he exclaimed. "At least there is a chance, if you will do as I say."

The K'harn looked at him. "How? The door is locked. There is always a guard in the corridor outside. I have tried more than once and could not break out. Oll was killed, trying."

"Not that way," said Evers. "We've got to use our wits. There will be ships of law arriving here ten hours or so from now. What we have to do is use our wits to stay alive till GC gets here."

He went on to explain to Rrulu that Sharr was in hiding in the warehouse of loot, unsuspected by anyone, and that when the GC cruisers arrived, the Valloan girl could come out of hiding and tell the GC men everything.

Evers added, "We've got to stall

until then. Schuyler put me in here because I speak your language. I am to offer you safe return to your own galaxy if you will explain the workings of the machines and instruments they brought from Andromeda."

Rrulu stiffened. "Those things are the looted instruments of Knowledge from our worlds. I saw them taken, I say K'harn shot down defending them. I will not help these killers. Not now, not ever."

Evers said hastily, "I know. I don't want you to. What I do want you to do is to bluff Schuyler along, make a pretense of being willing to explain all those gadgets."

But it seemed that deception was as new and difficult a concept to the K'harn's thinking, as violence had formerly been.

"I will tell them nothing," he said.

Evers began to sweat. He feared now that the obsession of hatred which dominated Rrulu was going to cross out their only chance. He tried another approach.

"You say you've thought up a way by which your people could adapt their scientific instruments into weapons, to use against Schuyler's ships?"

Rrulu's eyes blazed. "Yes—by reversing our synthesizers. You do not understand our science. But we create metal, plastics, any element, by mechanisms that generate a force which causes free sub-atomic particles, free energy, to cohere into matter. The same mechanisms could be quickly reversed to *de-cohere* any chosen elements into energy again. We could utterly destroy invading ships!"

"Then if you could return to Ky, you could teach your people how to defend themselves," Evers said. He added quickly, "But my way is the only way you can live to return—by pretending to yield to Schuyler."

Slowly, the K'harn's expression changed. He was silent for moments, and then said, "I will do as you say."

"Good!" breathed Evers. "Now listen. They'll be back soon to ask me what your answer is. I'll say that you're tired of imprisonment, and will explain the instruments and their powers, with me as interpreter."

"But then they will demand that I do so at once," objected Rrulu. "And they will at once find out that it is all deception, that I mean to tell them nothing."

"I'm betting that they *won't* ask you to start explaining things right away, but wait till later," Evers said. "Don't you see—the GC ships will be here before long. Schuyler

has to keep you and I and Lindeman strictly under cover until the GC has come and gone. He'll wait till after they've left, before starting to question you."

EVERS CONCLUDED grimly, "But he won't get a chance. When GC gets here and Sharr comes out and blows the gaff on the whole thing, Schuyler is through right then."

He could see that Rrulu was doubtful and uneasy about the whole plan. The K'harn, lacking the human capacity for intrigue, was poorly fitted for such a bluff. Evers anxiously drilled him over and over, warning him that he must appear beaten, not defiant.

Of a sudden, there was a sound at the door that brought Evers sharply around. It was the sound of the lock outside the door being turned.

"Here they are," said Evers. "They didn't give me as much time to persuade you as I'd expected. But remember, if we bluff them now, it'll work."

He could hear the lock turning this way and that, for what seemed to his tautly strung nerves an interminable time. Finally the door swung open.

In its opening stood Sharr.

The Valloan girl was silhouetted against the brightly lighted corridor outside. She had a gun in one hand, and her lithe body was tense as she peered into the comparatively dark cell.

Evers bounded forward. "Sharr! For God's sake, how—what—"

Her hand grasped his sleeve and her green eyes were brilliant as she babbled up to him.

"I've found you! I was afraid they'd killed you! I found the other—Lindeman—but he's stunned, sleeping. I—"

"But why did you leave the warehouse?" Evers demanded. "Did they find your hiding-place?"

"No!" said Sharr. "But I saw them taking you away. I had to try to reach you, before they tortured or killed you. I had the gun you'd given me, and I got through the darkness to this house, and slipped in a servant-door, and hid and watched. When I saw one of the men who had taken you come up from below, I came down here. There was another guard—"

Evers felt the death-knell of his hopes. Everything had depended on Sharr, whose presence on Arkar nobody suspected, remaining in hiding until the GC came and she could emerge and tell them the truth. Instead, she had come out and used the consumnate skill of the hereditary thieves of Valloa to seek and find him.

His whole plan was in ruins, for

it was still hours till the GC cruisers would arrive and he did not now think they were likely to live that long. Yet how could he reproach Sharr, when she had risked her own safety to find them?

"You shouldn't have—", he began, and then he stopped. Sharr's face had gone white, and her eyes, looking over his shoulder into the shadowy cell behind him, were distended. Her mouth opened on a scream.

He knew instantly that she had seen Rrulu in the shadows hack there, and that the totally unexpected sight of the big, spidery K'harn was the cause of her horror.

Evers' hand clapped over her mouth, stifling the scream. He gripped her and spoke in her ear.

"He is a friend. A *friend*. One of the K'harn I told you ahout. A prisoner like myself."

He did not trust her until her efforts to squirm loose and screech quieted down. Then he removed his hand from her mouth.

Sharr shivered, but kept quiet. Only her eyes never left the unhuman figure of the K'harn.

Evers felt the desperation of defeat. They might get out and hide for a little while but their escape would soon be discovered and they would be caught long before GC came, and Schuyler would win after all.

"Damn it, *no!*" he told himself. "There must be some way to beat him, even if we go under."

Rrulu moved restlessly forward, and Sharr shivered. And of a sudden, Evers seized on a possibility. It might be a poor one, but it was the only one left.

He said swiftly to Rrulu, "You said you could adapt the instruments of Knowledge of the K'harn for destruction."

"Yes!" said Rrulu, a somber flash lighting his eyes. "In all this time alone I have calculated the way to do that—something no K'harn ever thought of before."

"There are many instruments looted from your Houses of Knowledge, in that warehouse," Evers said. "Could you use them? How long would it take?"

"Not long, if the right instruments are there," said the K'harn. "If there is a synthesizer there I could reverse the polarity of its forces and—"

Evers interrupted. "All right. We'll try it. What I want you to do, if you can, is to cause as much destruction as possible here. Then, even if they get us, GC will surely investigate what's going on here on Arkar."

He told Sharr rapidly then, and added, "I think we're gone geese anyway, but if Rrulu can do some spectacular damage, it'll surely

hlow the lid off things here. Where's Lindeman?"

"In the next room," she whispered. "I did not know which you were in, I had to open them all. A six-year-old child of Valloa would laugh at such locks." She added, "They didn't hurt you?"

There was something in her face as she asked the last, and Evers bent forward and kissed her. He took the gun from her hand and went out into the hright corridor.

Rrulu had said there was always a guard on duty hut there was no one in the corridor now. Evers hastened to the next door, with Sharr trailing close behind him and looking hack fearfully at the K'harn following them.

The door was closed hut not locked. He stepped inside and stopped, startled.

Lindeman lay on a cot, stirring and moaning a little as the effect of the stunner began to wear off.

On the floor with his face upward lay one of the tough-faced men.

"He was in the corridor when I came down," Sharr said. "I shot him. I dragged him in here in case anyone came down."

Evers thought to himself that Sharr was a true daughter of barbaric Valloa. She had given the man a full-strength beam. Remembering Straw, he could not be sorry.

He sprang forward and hegan to chafe Lindeman's wrists and smack his cheeks, trying to hring him back to consciousness.

Lindeman moaned, "Damn you, Schuyler." But he did not open his eyes.

"We can't hring him around," Evers said. "We'll have to carry him, for we've got little time."

Sharr suddenly turned her head sharply; and then ran to the door.

"There is no time at all," she whispered. "Listen!"

CHAPTER VIII

EVERS SPRANG to the door, snatching out his weapon. He pushed Sharr back into the room, and stood in the doorway listening.

Boots were clumping down the stair at the end of the hallway. It was only one man, and as his feet came into view on the stair, the man was saying loudly,

"Roy, I—"

At that moment the man's face came into view as he descended the stair. It was the other tough-faced man. Alarm flashed into his battered face as he saw no one in the corridor.

Before he could move, Evers stepped out into the corridor with his energy-gun levelled.

"It's on lethal," Evers said. "Keep your hands away from your

sides. Walk this way."

The tough-faced man looked at him. He was estimating his chances. Whatever was in Evers' face seemed to he enough to convince him that his chances were not good. He spread his arms out and walked down the corridor.

Sharr, keeping well out of Evers' line of fire, reached out and took the weapon from the man's belt. Evers gestured to the open doorway of the cell.

"In there."

The tough-faced man walked in. He glanced swiftly at Rrulu, crouched burning-eyed and grotesque and terrihle, and at Lindeman, lying on the cot. Then he looked at the man on the floor, at his hlank face and sightless eyes.

"There's Roy," said Evers. "He's dead. You'll likely he right with him in another minute."

The man looked from the figure on the floor to Evers, and his face hecame gray and sick.

"You can live," said Evers. "We're going out of here, and we don't want to be seen. You lead us out and if no one sees us, you live."

The touch-faced man was sweating. He said hoarsely, "There's no way I can do that."

"That's too had for you," said Evers.

"Kill him," said Rrulu in his hissing speech.

The man could not understand the words hut he understood the menace in the tone and in the unhuman, flaring eyes. He seemed to wilt.

"There's a stair up to the back car-park, for unloading stuff," he said.

"That'll do fine," said Evers. He spoke to the K'harn in his own language. "Bring my friend, we are going out." And then to the tough-faced man he said, "All right. Keep right ahead of me."

They started down the corridor in a strange little procession, the man in front, Evers behind him with the gun in his back, the red-haired Valloan girl and then the hig, spidery K'harn, carrying the half-conscious Lindeman hy one limh as easily as a doll, and walking with a scuttling glide on the other three.

Their unhappy guide went past the hottom of the stair, and opened a door beyond it. There was a ramp there, leading upward. It ended in another closed door. The tough-faced man swung the door outward and started through.

He suddenly moved very fast. He sprang out and at the same time swung the door violently hack to hit Evers in the face.

Evers was taken off guard, yet

the trick did not succeed. The door hit his extended foot and that checked its swing. Instantly Evers lunged through it.

Out here in the open, he dared not risk firing a crackling blast from the gun. Instead, as he swung, he raised the weapon and brought its barrel down on the tough man's head.

He was just in time. A loud yell that had been in the man's throat came out as a grunt, and he collapsed.

EVERS DRAGGED him into the concealment of nearby dandelion shrubs, and then looked around. They were in the shadow of the metal castle's great wall, near the rear. Through the darkness he descried two parked vehicles under towering lily-trees farther back—a car and two tracs.

"We'll take that car," he said instantly to Sharr. "If you and Rrulu and Eric keep down, I can pass as a driver on an errand, in the darkness."

"It will soon be daylight!" she warned. "The sky shows a little light, that way."

Two minutes later, Evers drove the car with deliberate lack of haste away from the looming mansion and down the road of giant flowers. There was indeed a thin band of ruddy light low in the dark sky ahead, and he resisted the temptation to go fast. In the back seat, Sharr crouched down beside the unconscious Lindeman, keeping herself well away from the crouching figure of the K'harn.

Evers drove out onto the compound of the dock area. But he kept his course so as to circle around behind the docks, toward the warehouses. The men working under krypton lights around the star-ships, though they must have heard him, did not look up as he went unhurriedly by. Breathing more easily, he drew the car up in the shadow behind that warehouse in which Straw had died.

Rrulu, with a fierce impatience, bounded out of the car. Evers gave Sharr a torch he found under the dash, and then he picked up Lindeman and followed the K'harn and the Valloan girl.

The warehouse door was still unlocked as Sharr had left it. They went inside and he closed the door and set Lindeman down on the floor. Sharr's torch came on, playing over that tangle of incomprehensible mechanisms and instruments, and Rrulu uttered a low, passionate exclamation.

"The treasures of a dozen Houses of Knowledge, riven away from my people!"

Evers asked rapidly, "What can you do with them?"

The K'harn took the torch from

Sharr and ran forward, examining the great pile of loot.

Sharr was bending over Lindeman. She looked pale and crumpled, and not at all like the cocksure Valloan girl who had impudently taken him away from a GC man not too long before.

Evers was tired too, and feeling a sick foretaste of ultimate defeat. It had been a foolish thing, he felt now, to pin their last gamble on the half-mad K'harn's obsession. As far as he could see, Rrulu was doing nothing, just poking and prying amid the mass of mechanisms.

He told Sharr, "Stay by the door and watch through the crack. Call if anyone comes."

She said, "And if they do?"

"I'm afraid it's not 'if' but 'when'", he said "Cheer up, Sharr. It may he finish for us but if Rrulu can do anything it'll wind up Schuyler too."

He left her at the door and went to where the K'harn had brought a glittering mechanism out of the mass, and was crouching beside it.

It was the big object which had formerly reminded Evers of an enormous toy. There was a two-foot crystal sphere at its center, and around that on metal tracks were mounted a dozen smaller crystal spheres of varying size. There was a complex of wiring underneath, linked to one of the black cubes that Rrulu had called power-cubes.

The K'harn, crouching beside the enigmatic mechanism like a great spider hy its prey, was intently engaged in moving the small crystals from one "orbit" to another exchanging their places, revising the wiring.

"What can the thing do?" Evers asked him, hut it was a minute hefore the busy K'harn answered

"It is a synthesizer. As I told you, it can generate a force that converts free energy into any chosen elements When I get through with it, it will reverse that process."

Evers was increasingly dubious. He was a scientist himself and he could imagine no way by which the glittering thing could accomplish such a feat.

"Then you can destroy with it—enough to call the attention of the GC men when they come?"

"Be sure of that," said Rrulu. "But it will take a little time, to alter the circuits—"

Evers thought heavily that time was the last thing they would be allowed, and with the thought came a call from Sharr at the door.

"I think your escape is discovered," said the girl.

Evers bounded to the door. The whole sky was turning crimson as the red sun of Arkar showed its rim above the horizon. The blood-

like rays illuminated the compounds, the docks and star-ships, the tall flower-trees and their giant blooms, the arrogant dome of Schuyler's metal mansion towering in the distance above everything.

From the direction of the mansion, two cars were racing toward the dock area. Men ran from the cars into shops and barracks. Then a warning siren began to scream.

"Yes, they're going to start searching for us," Evers muttered. He swung around to the K'harn, whose weird hands were now flying over the wires of crystals of the machine. "How much longer, Rrulu?"

"Several minutes, at least. I can't do it any faster—"

Evers, coming to an icy decision, drew his gun. He thought they were all of them near the end of their rope, but till he stopped breathing he meant to hit back at Schuyler. A few minutes might do it—

He said to Sharr, "Only one way to give Rrulu time enough—and that's to decoy them away from here. I'm going to hit for the forest. They'll hear the alarm and follow me, and won't bother the warehouse for a while."

"But they'll catch you and kill you!" she cried. "Schuyler will take no more chances—"

He paid no attention to her objections. He opened the warehouse door a little and slid out, and plunged for the neighboring forest.

HE CROSSED the invisible detector beam, and the bells started their clangoring alarm. Evers glanced back and saw men back by the docks pointing and running forward.

He also saw Sharr, running silently right behind him on her bare feet.

"Why didn't you stay?" he cried.

"I go with you!" she said. "I—"

"Duck!" he yelled, and grabbed her and hit the dirt just inside the forest, as lethal beams ripped the foliage over their heads.

He took her hand and scrambled up and ran on, through the underbrush beneath the lovely, looming flower-trees, with the red sunlight strong now in their faces.

"Keep in the brush," Evers panted. "Their tracs can't follow us in it, and the longer we keep going the more time it gives Rrulu."

Ironically, almost as he said that, they heard a sound of crashing progress through the brush at several places behind them.

"What is it?" asked Sharr, seeing his face.

"They're following us with Workers," Evers said.

He needed to say no more. The Workers could go through anything, and faster than any human.

They plunged on, the thorny shrubs ripping their garments, scratching their arms and legs, and the ominous crashing strides behind them came closer each moment.

It seemed incredible to Evers that this should be the end of everything, and yet he knew it was —the cruelly anti-climactic conclusion of Lindeman's great dream.

They burst suddenly out of the brush into the rubbly dark stones of the ancient ruins of Arkar. Sharr's foot twisted on a loose bit of rock, and she cried out in pain and fell. Evers stooped to help her up.

She screamed, and he heard the *thump-crash-thump* close behind him, and whirled around.

A Worker, its giant blue metal body towering enormous in the bloody light, was striding out of the brush after them. Its human controller was keeping back out of sight, using the robot's radar "vision" to find the fugitives.

Evers fired at the mindless giant, and knew as he triggered that his beam could not harm the thing.

Yellow destruction-beams flashed out of the eye-like apertures in the Worker's metal body, almost instantly.

The beams *missed.*

Incredulously, Evers saw that the Worker was staggering and floundering as though out of control, its beams flashing aimlessly and blasting the dark stones nearby. He heard cries of astonishment and terror from back in the brush toward the spaceport.

Next moment, a hand of pulsing, cold, white light seemed to expand from back there toward them. The light engulfed the staggering Worker.

The Worker's metal body wavered hazily, changed, melted into blue vapor—and was gone.

The expanding white light reached Evers and Sharr. He looked down stupefiedly at his hand. The gun in it was changing to smoke, drifting away, and his fingers closed on emptiness.

Then he understood.

"By God, Rrulu did it! A wave of force, that's tuned to de-cohere *metals* and nothing else into energy—"

He got Sharr to her feet and started back with her, running toward the compound on the wide open trail that the Worker had made.

He reached the edge of the compound. They stopped, staring.

The warehouse in which he had left Rrulu and Lindeman was gone. So was everything that had been in it, except Lindeman's senseless form, and Rrulu, and the machine

of crystal over which the K'harn bent.

The crystal spberes of that alien mechanism were silently spinning around the central sphere, faster than tbe eye could follow. Light, blazing force, pulsed out from tbem as though pumped outward. Here was tbe source of that expanding ring of metal-destroying force.

The ring of force bad expanded across balf the compound. The other warebouses were gone. The star-ships in the docks were all gone but one, and even as Evers stared that one ship melted into vapor, and so did the Workers stalking beyond it, and the cranes and machinery beyond them.

Tbe men of Schuyler were standing paralyzed by the incredible, stupefied by the vanisbing of the weapons in tbeir hands, the cars and tracs they had been driving, tbe ships upon which they had been working.

Evers and Sharr ran to Rrulu. Tbe K'barn's great eyes flared with triumpb.

"You did it—but you destroyed all the things that were stolen from your own worlds!" cried Evers.

"And that is well," said Rrulu. "Tbose things will never be used by murderers. Nor this one—wben its work is done, I will destroy it too."

A hoarse voice yelling in the distance swung Evers around. It came from a tall figure in a silken blue coverall who was shouting frenziedly to the stupefied, staring men. It was Schuyler.

"Get them with your bare hands!" Schuyler was yelling. "Stop tbem before—"

One of the men pointed, crying out, and Schuyler turned and looked. And there in the distance the expanding ring of force had reacbed the looming metal mansion. The proud dome wavered, shifted into smoke, and then was gone from among the tall flower-trees.

Schuyler turned back and came straigbt on toward Evers and Rrulu, and his face was now the face of a madman.

"Don't kill him!" cried Evers.

Rrulu had bounded forward, a terrible figure in his scuttling spidery rush, and had seized the magnate.

Evers ran toward them. "Don't kill him! He's our hostage against his men—when they recover from their daze, we'll need him to hold them back till GC gets bere!"

He pried the K'harn's hands away from Schuyler's tbroat. Schuyler's face was already distorted and blue, but he was still breathing.

Across the compound, the men were still standing like men in a dream, some of tbem babbling,

some of them just staring wildly.

Rrulu reached out and touched the base of the machine, and the spinning chystal spheres slowed their revolutions. The ring of force disappeared. They looked at each other, and then across the compound from which everything metal, every man-made structure, had disappeared.

There was no triumph in Rrulu's face now. It was sick and strained and strange as he looked at Evers. He said.

"I am the first K'harn ever to use our wisdom for destruction. It was necessary. But I am ashamed."

IN THE GC CRUISER speeding away from Arkar, Lindeman lay sleeping. Evers gave up all idea of awakening him yet, and he and Sharr went out of the little cabin.

The commander of the cruiser met them in the corridor. He said,

"I've been down to see our prisoners. Schuyler's all right, and talking about his lawyers."

"He won't squeeze out of this, will he?" said Evers.

The commander laughed. "A dozen of his men are ready right now to give evidence. He hasn't got a chance. If nothing else, your queer friend's testimony would be enough."

He looked along the corridor to where Rrulu stood beside a window, looking somberly at the blurred grayness outside.

The GC officer shivered. "He surely did a job. Never saw anything like it. I'll be glad when he and his knowledge are back in their own galaxy." He added, his face hardening, "That'll be as soon as we can build the Lindeman drive into a dozen cruisers. We're going to Andromeda in force—and any of Schuyler's looters still there will get a nasty surprise."

When the GC man had gone, Sharr said, "I will soon be back in my own home, too. It will be good. I don't like Earthmen."

She did not look at him as she said it. Evers looked down at her. He said,

"You know very well that you're not going back to Valloa, that I love you and you're going with me. You just want to make me say it."

She still did not look up at him, but she came and put her head against him and began to cry.

Evers, holding her, patted her red head. He said, "Only two things. On Earth, people don't understand the respectability of being an hereditary thief. So no more of that."

"No more," said Sharr muffledly.

He felt the back of his neck. "And no matter what arguments we have, no more Valloan judo. *Absolutely* no more."

Successful interplanetary commerce often depended on creating a demand for something not really necessary. As a case in point take the —

Flypaper Planet

by

A. Bertram Chandler

"I SUPPOSE HE KNOWS what he's doing," said Captain James.

"If he doesn't, it's *his* funeral," replied Bellows, the Purser. "The freight's been paid, and that's all that concerns *us*."

"Even so, it's odd," persisted the shipmaster. "Our last two voyages we've brought him out the usual trade goods—mirrors and pocket knives and scissors and all the rest of the relatively harmless junk allowed by the Commission. *This* voyage. . ." He snatched the Manifest from the Purser's hand. He read aloud, " 'Consignee, J. Latimer, Licensed Trader, Burrumlahory. . .Twelve cases of candy. . .' That's normal enough—except that he told me that the natives don't like candy. . . 'Twenty cases, each containing one gross cartons of flypapers. . .' " He paused for effect. "How many packets of flypapers to a carton? A gross? And how many flypapers to a packet?"

"I don't know," said the Purser.

"You should."

"But it's none of our business, sir."

"Maybe it isn't—but I have the right to be a Nosey Parker aboard my own ship, Mr. Bellows. Anyhow—as soon as Latimer shows up with the papers, tell him that I'd like to see him in my cabin."

"You aren't going to *ask* him, sir, surely?" protested Bellows.

"And why shouldn't I? Anyhow, if it sets your mind at rest, I'm just going to invite him to have a drink with me—and any Earthman stuck on this benighted planet will be glad enough to have a drink in civilized surroundings." He gestured towards the viewport. "Look at it! Trees like purple cabbages and grass like white worms, and a sky that needs only a few crou-

tons to make it an exact copy of split pea soup! People like armour plated baboons with a pair of arms too many! Houses like mud pies that somebody's sat on!"

"You don't like Burrumlabory, sir," suggested the Purser.

"Too right I don't. I'm always glad to blast off from the blasted place. And as soon as Mr. blasted Latimer comes to collect his blasted cargo I'll do just that."

"We have to load . . ." said Bellows.

"Ay. Bales of those *lishita* hides that'll have the ship stinking like rotten fish mixed with cheap scent. The Company should charge extra freight on the filth—and pass it on to us as Smell Money! H'm. There's Latimer now."

The two officers watched the chubby little figure of the Trader, immaculate in white shorts, shirt and helmet, strutting towards the ship. Behind him shambled half a dozen natives, each carrying a bale on his head.

"*Lishita* hides," growled Captain James. "Tell the Mate from me to start the de-odorizer before he loads a single bale—if he catches the stink in time it mightn't be so bad. And ask Latimer to come up to see me - he'll not turn down the chance of a free drink."

"Very good, sir," said Bellows. He turned smartly, then clattered down the companionway into the body of the ship.

"EXCELLENT WHISKY, Captain," said Latimer, holding his empty glass up to the light.

"Some more?" asked James, without enthusiasm.

"Thank you, Captain. Thank you. My supplies are running a little low, and for the past two weeks I have had to indulge myself sparingly in life's little luxuries . . ."

"I would have thought," said James, "that your supplies of trade goods would be running a little low as well. Those *lishita* hides we're loading now must represent a sizable equivalent in mirrors and pocket knives and chocolates . . ."

"They do, indeed they do. But I can promise you, Captain, that your next voyage here you'll be picking up at least double the quantity of hides . . ."

He lapsed into silence, staring at his empty glass.

James took the hint.

He said then, "I find this trading business rather fascinating. The *odd* things we carry . . ."

"We deal with odd peoples," said Latimer.

"I," said James, "would classify as odd a people who live on carrion, have hides that would stop a high velocity bullet, and who are yet sufficiently ticklish or fussy to

need sucb things as flypapers . . ."

"Perhaps they put them to an odd use," murmured Latimer. He grinned. "I'll he frank with you, Captain James. Those flypapers may well he worth their bulk in *lishita* hides—hut flypapers is all they are, and flypapers is all they're going to be used as. Oh, I admit that there was no demand for such things when I first came here—but there is now. Indeed, yes."

"And you created the demand, Latimer?"

"Why not?" Latimer helped himself from the decanter. "That is the essence of successful trading. That is why I shall be touring the Galaxy in my space yacht when you're still skipper of this interstellar rust bucket, running on the Company's tram lines from bad worlds to worse ones. You have to use your imagination, Captain. You have to use a smattering of all the sciences. You have to find out what people don't want—and make them want it . . ."

"All right," growled James. "What did you *do?*"

Latimer laughed squeakily.

"They have insects here—at least, they're analogous to insects. They fly and they crawl and they burrow. Until now, my customers have always ignored them—especially since, oddly enough, none of the local pests has developed a taste for any of tbe foods usually eaten by the natives. Well, there's one species of flying thing not unlike the Terran bee. It lives in colonies. I discovered—to my intense annoyance at the time—that it has a passion for chocolate. It will go through *anything*—even thin metal—to get at chocolate. The natives, on the other hand, haven't a sweet tooth in tbeir ugly, dog-faced heads. Limburger cheese would be more to tbeir taste. (They make a cheese of sorts that's not unlike Limhurger . . .) Anyhow, I experimented. At last I came up with a mixture—rotting fisb and chocolate—that appealed both to the natives and these bee things. It had to be—as far as the insects were concerned—just right. I tried one of the doctored chocolates myself, and I was sick for the best part of two days.

"Tbose cbocolates sold like hot cakes. At first I made the mistake of letting them go in small lots—but that meant that tbe hees never got a chance of getting at them. So I made a ruling that they were to be sold by the full box, or not at all. This worked. That night the village sounded as though somebody had set up a power sawmill and was working overtime. Tbe bees got away with every piece of candy in the place.

"The natives aren't fools. The next morning they wanted to he allowed to huy chocolates as usual hut to have the privilege of keeping them in my strongroom and taken out only as eaten. This I just wouldn't come at. I promised, however, to import something that would protect their candy from the insects. Those flypapers are made to my own specifications - chocolate flavoured . . ."

"It should work," admitted the Captain. He got to his feet, walked to the viewport. He said, "Looks as though your cargo's out and in, Latimer. Time I was getting upstairs."

"One for the road, Captain," said Latimer, ignoring the shipmaster's glare. He had one for the road. "Well, au revoir, Captain James. Thanks for the party. I'll think of you when I'm hiring a skipper for my yacht . . ."

"You needn't bother," said James, making a meaningless social gesture of the rite of shaking hands. Before his guest was out of the door he had picked up the microphone on his desk and was shouting, "Secure for space, Mr. Carr! Mr. Bellows, report to me at once!"

"And did you find out, sir?" asked the Purser when he came in.

"Yes, Mr. Bellows. It's all a matter of creating a demand for flypapers on a world where there's never heen any need for them. We'll talk ahout it—you and Mr. Carr and myself—after we get out and clear. There're more ways of making money than driving other people's rust huckets around the Galaxy."

CAPTAIN JAMES SAT in his cahin, waiting for his Mate and his Purser to report to him. He wrinkled his nose as the delicate aroma of *lishita* hides seeped through the ventilation louvre. He decided that there were more pleasant ways of making a living than the carriage of such odorous cargoes. He helched, then eased the helt holding him to his chair. Free Fall never agreed with him. Too, the whine of the Mannschen Drive always gave him a slight headache.

There was a rapping at his door.

"Come in," he shouted.

Carr entered first, reminding James, as he twisted his long, thin hody to reach for his chair, of a snake. Bellows—small and plump—needed only a pair of those hopelessly inadequate little wings drawn hy artists with no knowledge of aerodynamics to make him look like a cheruh.

"Sit down," ordered James, five seconds too late; the Mate and the Purser were already strapped into their seats. "Help yourselves to a

drink." He set the example. "If there's one thing I *hate*," he said, "it's good Scotch out of a plastihulh."

"It's hetter than no Scotch," said Carr.

"But need we put up with it?" asked James.

"Unless we invent some kind of artificial gravity, we have no choice," said Carr. "It'll have to he something that'll work when the Drive is operating, so centrifugal force is out . . ."

"Please curh your inventive genius," pleaded the Captain. "I still remember, all too well, what happened when you tried to hreed algae that would produce alcoholic liquor as well as food. Or if you *must* invent something, try to make it *useful*, from a financial angle. If that clot Latimer can do it, surely you can."

"And what did Latimer invent, sir?" asked the Mate.

James told him. He told the story of the demand that had heen created where no demand existed before. He told the story of the bees and the chocolates and the stinking fish.

"Clever," admitted Carr.

"Of course it's clever. But this is my point—Latimer hasn't the hrains that we have. He could never pass the examination for a Master Astronaut's Certificate. And yet he'll he a millionaire while we'll he still spacemen."

"What can we do ahout it?" asked Carr.

"That's what I'm asking *you*, Mister. Surely in all the worlds along our route there must he one where an artificial demand can he created."

"It would seem so," agreed Bellows. "But flypapers are such sticky things to handle, sir . . ."

"Mr. Bellows," said James patiently, "nohody said anything ahout creating a demand for flypapers. All we want to do is to create a demand. Period."

"But why not flypapers, sir?" asked Carr. "I say that we should consider them first of all—they're as good a starting point as any. I say that we can prove ourselves at least as ingenious as Latimer."

"Very well, then, Mr. Carr. Put your fine, inventive mind to work. Create a demand for flypapers."

Carr smiled.

"You know, sir," he said, "I rather think that we can. Our first port of call after Burrumlahory, on the homeward passage, is Glink . . ."

"Another planet with armour plated ahorigines," complained James. "Another world whose natives aren't at all liahle to he bothered hy insects."

"True. A world whose inhabit-

ants aren't liable to be bothered by insects—but whose inhabitants will be bothered by a shortage of them. The Glinkans, if my memory serves me aright, are descended from an animal tbat must have been remarkably similar to the Terrestrial anteater both in appearance and babits. And dietary habits die hard. Our own ancestors, for example, must have been scavengers before they became hunters, must have made many a hearty meal on the putrid offal left by sabre toothed tigers and the like. This atavistic craving for carrion still persists in most of us . . ."

"Rubbish!" interjected Captain, James.

"No, sir—it's not rubbish. I've seen *you* digging into the Gorgonzola cheese at table, and I've refused Camembert when it's been insufficiently ripe. Anyhow—the Glinkans, although they now have their cereal crops and herds of meat animals, still relish the odd insect. I've seen them walking down the streets in their towns, and one of them will stop and look down at the pavement, and then his long, sticky tongue will slide out of his mouth and pick up some unfortunate beetle or such . . ."

"Selling flypapers to the Glinkans," said James, "would be like persuading a heavily bearded man to buy a smart necktie."

"As things are now," agneed Carr. "But bere's my point—there are no flying insects on Glink. And if there were they'd be quite safe from the natives—their tongues would be far too slow to catch anything on the wing."

"What are you driving at?" asked James.

"Well, sir, suppose that some virus wiped out every insect on Glink. Suppose that new insects were introduced after the virus had died out—flying insects. Our next port of call is Callabra—whose people, as you know, are humanoid and roughly on the same technological level as ourselves. Tbe Callabrans, you may remember, made a big drive against insect pests on their world a couple of their years ago. Tbey developed a virus that wiped the planet clean of arthropodal life. Then they let loose another virus that wiped out the first one. Then they imported selected insects from other oxygen-carbon planets - just ones that would be useful in plant fertilization and such."

"Go on," said James, looking interested.

"WELL, WE PICK UP a supply of both viruses on Callabra. At Burrumlabory we pick up a fertilized queen of the local

bee-things, the chocolate eaters that Latimer hopes will make his fortune for him. As you know, the shorter the haul with any kind of livestock the better. At Glink we buy out Hall, the local Trader—I know that he'll jump at the chance. We'll even offer him a free passage home as Purser . . ."

"I could use an assistant," said Bellows.

"At Glink," continued Carr, ignoring the interruption, "we pay off Bellows. He holds a Trader's License. We leave Bellows there—and on our return we will find him ready to unload the cargo of flypapers that we will have purchased on our own behalf. The Company doesn't mind private trading—as long as officers pay full freight."

"But Glink," objected Bellows. "Glink, of all places!"

"One of us," said Carr, "must remain behind to look after the viruses and our own flying insects."

"But won't they be affected by the virus?" asked James

"I've thought of that point. They'll be in one of the deep freeze containers, of course, hermetically sealed. As a precaution we can put a few drops of the virus-killing virus in with them. Bellows can liberate them after the right time lag—my friend on Callabra will be able to give me all the necessary data."

"Another point to consider," said James, "is this. I know Latimer. We all know Latimer. He's liable to smell some sort of rat if we start traipsing around his preserves on bee catching expeditions. He knows, as well as we know, that interference with a planet's ecology is a crime—and a serious one at that. He'll add two and two and make four as soon as he hears what's been happening on Glink—and is liable to run squealing to the Commission out of sheer spite."

"That's been thought of too," said Carr. "My friend on Callabra is one of the leading biologists. She helped to develop both viruses. She was among those who decided which life forms to reintroduce. She'll give us a written, stamped order for some specimens of the Burrumlabory bees. We'll pick them up on our homeward passage - after all, outward bound we quite often miss the minor worlds like Burrumlabory . . . Thanks to my carelessness—or, better still, Bellows' carelessness - the deep freeze container gets mixed up with the cargo we discharge on Glink. Bellows—who hasn't a clue (he'll say, if anybody should ever ask) will get around to opening it one fine day . . ."

"I resent that," said Bellows.

"Your share of the profits will help salve your injured feelings," said the Captain. He turned again to Carr. "There's one point that you didn't think of, Mister. You forgot that on Callabra the country people are very backward, that it's only in the cities that one finds an industrial civilization with all its trimmings. Isn't it just possible that in the villages they were still using flypapers? Isn't it just possible that vast stocks of flypaper are stored away somewhere—unsold and unsellable? Isn't it possible that we might be able to pick up all we need dirt cheap? We could land Bellows with his most important trade goods—and on our next call, outward bound, find him waiting for us with a stack of *glisha* nuts five miles high."

"Sir, I salute you," said Carr. "I bow to your superior genius."

"But I don't want to be left on Glink," complained Bellows.

The Captain and the Mate, drinking each other's health, paid no attention to him.

ALL WENT WELL on Callabra, the *Star Gypsy's* terminal port on the outward run. The Mate's girlfriend still loved him—the differences between Callabrans and Earthmen were such as to make the two species mutually attractive. Furthermore—and this was a point of similarity between the species—she did not dislike money.

Captain James was not overly keen on admitting a fourth partner to the enterprise, but agreed that it was unavoidable. She more than paid her way by putting James in touch with a manufacturer who had a warehouse full of unsellable flypapers. The partners could have afforded easily fully to load the ship with them, but the enterprize was still too much of a gamble for James to dare risk causing inconvenience to regular shippers, thereby incurring the wrath of the Company. He could, however, appropriate enough cargo space to get the venture off to a flying start.

At last came the morning when Carr bade his girl friend an affectionate farewell at the spaceport, shortly after which touching scene *Star Gypsy* lifted on the incandescent column of her exhaust, screamed up through the Callabran atmosphere and vanished, like a snuffed candle flame, when the interstellar drive went into operation. Shortly thereafter, measured by objective time, and even more shortly thereafter according to the subjective time experienced by her crew, she flickered into sight again in her pre-landing orbit around Grraz. A few hours later she dropped down to the delapidated Grrazian spaceport.

There was only a handful of cargo from Grraz—a bag of the huge, locally mined diamonds that would have been worth the ransom of at least a couple of Emperors in the days before the successful synthesis of such precious stones. There were also two passengers—Grrazian trade envoys to Earth. James was not displeased, although normally he hated passengers. He liked the Grrazians, as did almost everybody who came into contact with them. Their appearance—half pengion, half teddy bear - evoked happy childhood memories in most Earthlings.

The diamonds—the price of which, admitted Bellows, would have made a nasty hole in a month's pay—were their trade goods. They hoped, they told the Captain when he entertained them in his cabin, to be able to buy metals on Earth, their own planet being sadly deficient in the heavier elements. They doubted that they would be able, with their diamonds to purchase more than a few tons of steel.

"The trouble, Captain," said one of them, "is that we have nothing that your people really want. Not even our diamonds."

James felt sympathetic.

"The trouble with you," he said, "is that you haven't got sufficient business acumen to create a demand for what you have got. If you'd like some advice I'll be happy to give it to you. I must ask you, though, to treat everything I tell you as strictly confidential . . ."

"You know our reputation," said the Grrazian in a hurt voice "You know the saying—'Tight as a Grrazian's mouth'."

"Yes" agreed James. "I know. Anyhow, I'm going to tell you a story which may be of help to you. It will illustrate what I said about creating a demand . . ."

He told the story, minimising the part played by Latimer, whose original inspiration it had been, minimising the parts played by his officers and by the Callabran woman. The Grrazians were impressed. They agreed that such a financial wizard as Captain James would not remain a spaceman much longer. In their inimitable way they ladled out soft soap in exchange for the Captain's whisky and advice.

A week or so later, on Burrumlabory, they accompanied Carr and Bellows on the bee catching expedition, helping the Mate and the Purser to arrange the traps, baited with drugged chocolate, around one of the huge, conical nests of dried mud. They did most of the work of examining the dazed, but still vicious, insects, their thick fur making them impervious to the

sharp mandibles. They selected a pair of egg laying queens who had come crawling out to share in the feast; they found among the wriggling myriads a pair of virgin females and six males.

Back at the spaceport they allowed Latimer to escort them on a tour of inspection through the primitive village; saw, in almost every hut, the flypaper with its trapped, dying victims. They seemed to be impressed and, untypically of their race, succeeded in making a bitter enemy of the Trader. They should not, Carr explained to them later, have congratulated Latimer on his astuteness in taking Captain James' advice . . .

Then came the planet that Bellows was dreading - Glink. Before she landed *Star Gypsy* got in touch with Hall, the local Trader, by radio, asking him to name a price for his business and stock. Haggling continued during the ship's descent through the atmosphere. By the time that her landing gear had taken the strain of her setting down Hall had agreed to sell out - at a price well within the combined means of the syndicate. It was obvious, thought James, looking out through the control room ports, that Hall wasn't doing too well. There were barely enough *glisha* nuts stacked ready for shipment to make one meal for a medium sized Terran elephant.

BELLOWS, not looking at all happy, paid himself off. Hall, looking cheerful, signed the Articles of Agreement as Purser. Carr supervised the unloading of the flypapers and, of course, the sealed box containing the bees. The phials of virus were in Bellows' baggage. Cargo work was delayed when two of the native stevedores got into a fight over a large and succulent beetle which each claimed that he had seen first.

The late Purser had a last drink with Carr and James in the Captain's cabin. They cheered him up by telling him that once the trade was really well organised they would be able to employ a man to take over the Trader's work. They told him that his exile on this world of humid heat and pungent stinks would he a matter of months only. They conjured up rosy visions of the wealth that he would share. He was almost smiling when they shook hands with him at the airlock.

The remainder of the voyage was uneventful. Back on Earth James and the Mate were both husy during their periods of leave; there was much to be organized. James succeeded in persuading the Company's Freight Department into increasing the appropriation of

cargo space for *glisha* nuts on the homeward passage—the fact that this was done at the expense of the cubic footage allotted to Latimer's *lishita* hides made him all the happier. Once, on a visit to one of the big firms of importers, he ran into the two Grrazians. They regretted, they told him, that they would not be returning to their home world in his ship as they were taking an earlier sailing. James asked if they had been successful in their trade mission. They replied that they were not sure—yet. They had purchased no metals whatsoever. Their only accomplishment had been the hiring of a first rank industrial chemist, who would accompany them back to Grraz. His heavy baggage would follow in *Star Gypsy*.

"What do you intend doing?" asked James.

"We shan't tell you, Captain," they replied. "You Earthmen haven't the same respect for the secrets of others as we have."

James wasn't pleased by this answer, but he didn't let it worry him unduly. He had more important matters to exercise his mind. He would have given a sizable sum to have been able to discover how Bellows was making out—but the next ship in from Glink would arrive after *Star Gypsy's* departure. It was, reflected the Captain, one of the anomalies of interstellar commerce that a ship could make the passage between planetary systems in weeks, whereas it would take the laggard radio waves years—or centuries.

So it was with no regret that James and Carr said farewell to Earth. It was with a certain anxiety that they circled Glink before landing, waiting for the familiar voice of Bellows to come through the radiophone. Bellows sounded happy. He was happy, they discovered when he came prancing through the airlock to meet them. They were happy when he led them to a warehouse already filled almost to bursting with *glisha* nuts. Even the natives, said Bellows, were happy. They liked the flavour of the imported insects, and the flypapers ensured a plentiful supply of them on every table.

A few tons of the nuts were loaded—three was a limited demand for them on Callabra—and then *Star Gypsy* continued her voyage. She called at planets whose natives boasted a high level of civilization, she set down on worlds whose peoples were still living in mud huts. She put in to Burrumlatory, where James allowed himself the luxury of being extremely rude to Latimer. Let the fat little fool put in a stinking report to the Company and the Com-

mission, he thought. What did it matter now?

She put in to Grraz.

CARR, AT THE controls, knew that there was something wrong as soon as the landing gear touched the surface of the spaceport apron. There was not the usual, unavoidable jar.

"You're improving, Mister," James told him. "That was something like a landing should be." He looked out of the port. "At least our friends have done something to improve tbe apron. It looks rather odd, though, more like asphalt than concrete . . ."

"That would account for the way it felt," said Carr "Shall I go down to the airlock to meet the port officials, sir? This new Purser doesn't seem to have the hang of things yet."

"Carry on," said James. "I'll be in my cabin if you want me."

In a few minutes Carr did want him. His voice over the telephone was anxious.

"You'd better come down, sir. I don't like this at all."

"What's wrong, Mr. Carr?"

"It's our tail fins. They've already sunk at least three feet into whatever sort of muck it is that the field's been resurfaced with."

James hurried down to the airlock. He clattered down the ramp to the field. He stood with the Mate and looked at the vaned landing gear of the ship. It seemed to him that it sank inches more in the few seconds that he watched it.

One of the Grrazians was speaking—a grey furred native who wore, hanging around his neck, the large diamond that showed that he was a senior official.

"This is serious, Captain," he said.

"You're telling me!" replied James.

"We will sue your Company, Captain, for damages caused by your ship to our spaceport. We demand that you remove your vessel at once."

"We'd better do as he says," suggested Carr. "I don't like the way that this muck seems to have a grip on her." He shouted up to the Second Mate, who was standing in the airlock, "Secure for Space!"

"We'll throw ourselves into an orbit, and sort things out by radio," barked James to the official.

Moving fast, he led the way up the ramp, back into the ship.

Half an hour later *Star Gypsy* had yet to be thrown into her orbit - she had yet to leave the ground, in spite of the fact that her rockets had roared at full blast

for thirty minutes. Twenty minutes later the rockets were still roaring, and the Chief Engineer was screaming into his telephone that the main venturi was overheating and that the shell plating, aft, was beginning to buckle. Wearily, James cut the Drive.

Ten minutes later all hands were down on the landing field with sharp edged shovels broken out of the cargo. The blades of the shovels were of fine steel—but they would have been no less effective had they been of wood. The black, tarry substance oozed up around them and gripped them, seemed to pull them out of the men's hands.

Five minutes later James, cursing softly, watched the orifice of the main venturi sucked under. To attempt to fire the rockets now would be suicide.

JAMES AND CARR, white faced, sat in the Office of the Port Captain. Other Grrazians were there, including the two who had travelled, as commercial envoys to Earth, in *Star Gypsy*. James would have wondered, had he not been so worried about the safety of his ship, why they should have been among those present and why they should have been so apologetic of mien.

"The situation is clear," said the Port Captain in his almost perfect, only slightly accented English. "The regulations of the Commission—which is, I need hardly remind me, an essentially Terran organization—authorize the administration of any spaceport to clear the field of any ship unable to rise under her own power by breaking her up. After all—the field may be required for an emergency landing by another vessel at any time. . ."

James glared at the commercial envoys.

"I see," he said. "How much are you paying your renegade chemist? How many more ships are to be trapped here before your craving for metals is satisfied? What will you do when the Commission's dreadnoughts are orbitting around your planet and demanding reparation?"

"Your first two questions I refuse to answer," said one of the envoys. "As for your third question—will you dare to talk after you get away from Grraz? Our story will be that we were trying to improve our spaceport—but if we have to we will tell another story - the story of a Captain who, desirous of making his fortune, interferred with the ecology of another planet. The Commission will not be pleased to hear about the virus you loosed on Glink. . ."

"He's right," said Carr. "We'll never dare talk. All we can hope is that Bellows has the savvy to ship the nuts home in some other vessel when we don't turn up." He hegan to laugh. "Latimer thought that he was clever, creating a demand for flypapers. We thought that we were clever when we did the same thing. And now, as a reward for our cleverness, we've found out what it feels like to he a fly!"

THE END

★ Inter-Solar Beacons ★

A LONG CONSIDERED concept of interplanetary flight - - when it comes - - is the matter of radio navigation. It was felt that when the time comes, interplanetary space will be studded with radio beacons not unlike the present ones which dot the country to aid aerial navigation.

In one sense this may be superfluous. Radio-astronomy is turning up such surprising information on interplanetary broadcasting that the need for the man-made transmitters may vanish before they're begun.

Practically every body in the Solar System, the universe for that matter, is radiating energy from some band of wave-lengths. It is only a question of selecting your tuning to match the band. So far it appears that the frequencies are very high and the wave-lengths very short.

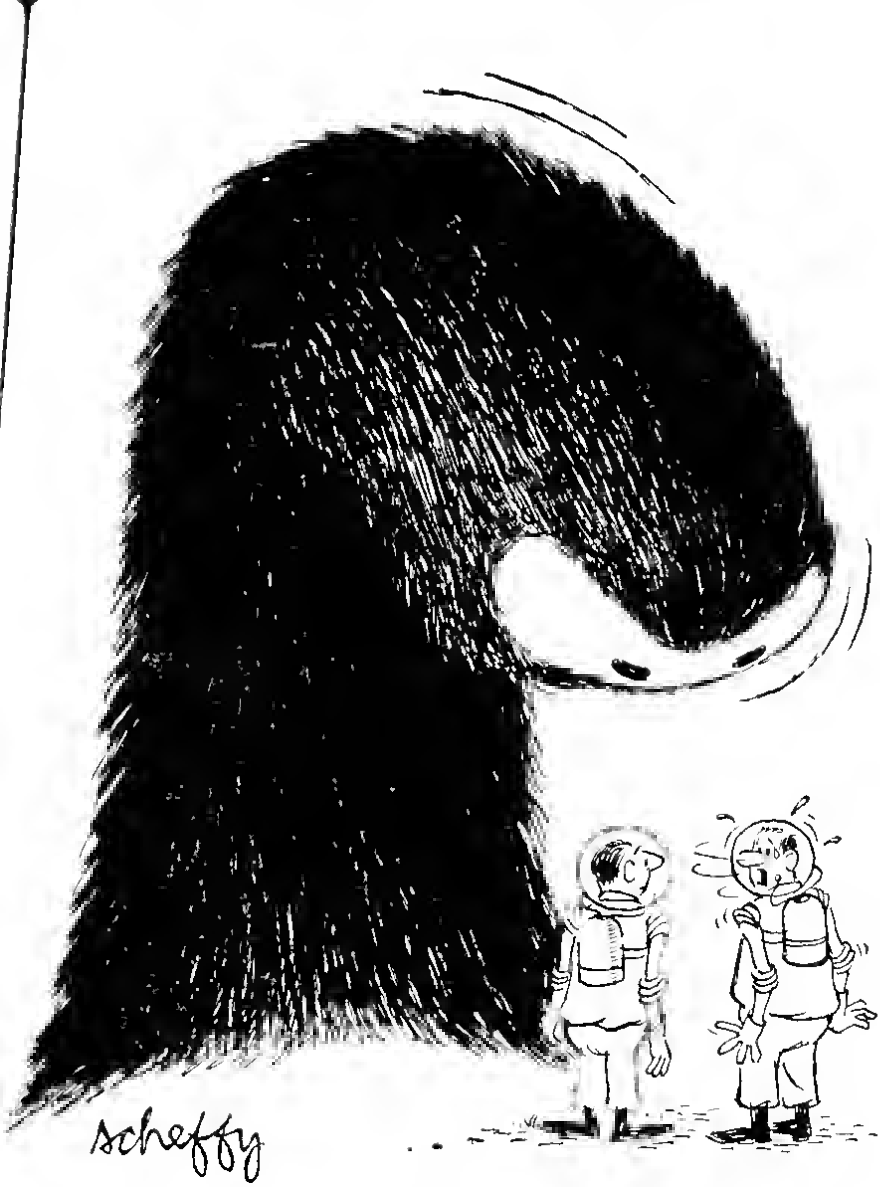
Any hot object, particularly the Sun, and the stars of course, are broadcasting gigantic blasts of electro-magnetic radiation which can be picked up almost on any receiver of reasonable sensitivity. We know that from Sun-spot interference with radio and TV.

Never the less, it is likely that when interplanetary astrogation does reach the point where many spaceships are out, it will be necessary to establish radio "buoys" which automatically will transmit coded signals for the orientation of the astrogator.

You might think simple optical astrogation would be adequate. For most work it will, but for automatic guiding, the radio beam provides a much more effective path. Furthermore it can be placed in the shadow of any stellar object.

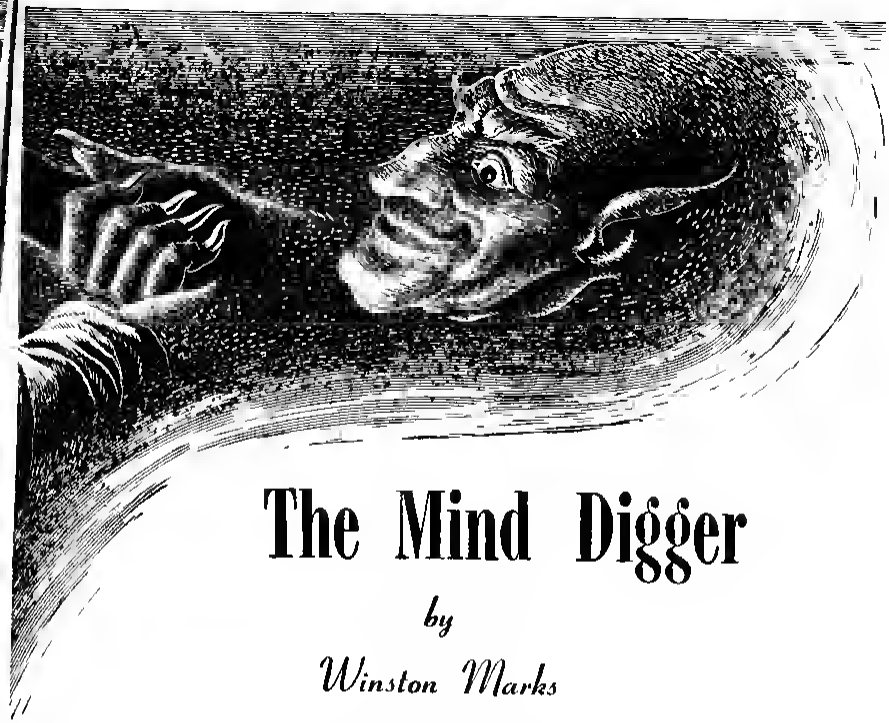
Man is small and panic is great. Taking an optical sight in a sky full of brilliant stars set against a jet black curtain will be far more difficult than turning a dial or watching a servo system pick out a frequency and check point.

Transmitters installed in empty space need not be terribly powerful if they use narrow beams. Von Braun, the rocketeer has worked out the theory of these beacons quite thoroughly and is convinced that they can be used practicably. Simple Morse pulses will guide the astrogators easily.



"I have to go to the bathroom!"

Wallace Berry



The Mind Digger

by

Winston Marks

There was o reason why his scripts were smash hits — they had realism. And why not? He wos reliving every scene and emotion in them!

IT WAS REALLY a pretty fair script, and it caught me at a moment when every playwright worth his salt was playing in France, prostituting in Hollywood or sulking in a slump. I needed a play badly, so I told Ellie to get this unknown up to my office and have a contract ready.

When she announced him on the inter-com, my door banged open and a youngster in blue-jeans, sweatshirt and a stubbly crew-cut popped in like a carelessly aimed champagne cork.

I said, "I'm sorry, son, but I have an interview right now. Besides we aren't casting yet. Come back in a couple of weeks."

His grin never faltered, being of

the more durable kind that you find on farms and west of the Rockies. His ragged sneakers padded across my Persian, and I thought he was going to spring over my desk like a losing tennis player.

"I'm your interview," he announced. "At least I'm Hillary Hardy, and your girl just told me you'd see me."

"You—are Hillary Hardy?"

"In the morbid flesh," he said jamming out five enthusiastic fingers that gulped my hand and jack-hammered until I broke his grip with a Red-Cross life-saving hold.

"Spare the meat," I groaned. "I have to sign the contract, too."

"I did it! I did it! They said I was crazy, but I did it the first time."

"Did what?"

"Sold the first play I wrote."

"This—is—your first work?"

"My very first," he said, splitting his freckles with a double row of white teeth a yard wide. "They said I'd have to go to college, and then I'd have to write a million words before I'd produce anything worthwhile."

If he hadn't owned such an honest, open face I'd have thrown him out as an imposter right then. The ream of neatly typed pages on my desk would have fooled any agent, editor or producer like myself, on Broadway. The format was professional, the plot carefully constructed, the dialogue breezy as a May afternoon in Chicago and the motivation solidly adult.

"How old are you?" I asked.

"Nineteen."

"And you'll sign an affidavit that you wrote this play, and it's an original work?"

"Certainly!" The smile faded a little. "Look, Mr. Crocker, you're not just kidding about this contract, are you? Is the play really okay?"

"That," I said trying to restrain my own enthusiasm, "is only determined on the boards. But I'm willing to risk a thousand-dollar advance on your signature to this." I shoved the papers at him with my fountain pen on top.

He didn't uncap the pen until he had read the whole thing, and while he pored over the fine print I had time to catch my breath.

His play competed rather well with the high average output of most professionals I knew—not exactly terrific, but a relatively safe gamble, as gamhles go on the street of bright lights. Well, I made a mental note to pass the script around a bit before I signed the contract myself. After all, he might have cribbed the whole thing somewhere.

He finished reading, signed the contract and handed it back to me with an air of expectancy. I stalled, "I, uh, will have the check for you in a few days. Meanwhile, you'd better get yourself an agent and an attorney and fix up that affidavit of authorship. Normally, I don't deal with free-lance playwrights, you see."

"But I don't need any agent," he protested. "You be my agent, Mr. Crocker—" He was studying my reaction, and after a moment he said, "You still don't quite believe that I wrote *Updraft*, do you, sir? Now that you've met me you want more time to check up, don't you?"

I said, "Frankly, yes, Hardy. *Updraft* is a mature piece of writing, and unless you are a genius—well, it's just business son."

"I don't blame you," he said smiling that fresh-air smile. "And I'll admit I'm no genius, but I can explain everything. You see, I've read 38 books on how to write plays—"

"Tut!" I said. "Format technique is just a fraction of producing an appealing play."

"Perhaps," he admitted. "But *I've memorized all 38 books.* What's more, I've been reading and memorizing plays, novels, poetry and history since I was 13. I have a storehouse of—"

"Memorizing?"

"Yes, sir. I'm a student of *mnemonics*, you know, the art of memory perfection. My real ambition is to develop absolute recall. All my reading and memorizing have been just exercises to expand my power of complete recall."

"You mean that playwriting is just a hobby?"

"Not—exactly. I need money, lots of it, to continue my research. Psychiatrists come high."

Well, I suppose good plays have been written for screwier reasons, and I was in no mood to look a gift-author in the mouth. I did pass *Updraft* around to a brace of critics, and none of them could hang a plagiarism charge on Hardy. So I wrote out his check and started the wheels going on the production.

The boy prodigy dropped out of sight for the time being, taking no further interest in his brainchild. *Updraft* did all right in the sticks, but it was when we opened on Broadway that it began to coin money.

IN TEN performances we were playing to capacity crowds, and within a month we had to take in the S. R. O. sign. A lucky hit? I thought so at the time. *Updraft* had a dash of humor, a bit of adventure, a dollop of romance and

a gentle little heart tug at the conclusion, but damned if the critics could put their fingers on its money-making essence. They gave it pleasant little reviews and mild compliments, but no more. The cash customers, however, came and kept coming and *kept coming!*

The morning after the 100th performance I told Ellie to hunt up Hardy and see what he was doing about another play. I could stand to have another hit ready when *Updraft* petered out.

That afternoon my secretary reported, "He's in a sanitarium over in Hoboken."

"Nuts! I knew we should have held back on his royalties," I exclaimed. "I suppose he's drunk himself into a—"

"It's a mental hospital," Ellie said, "but Mr. Hardy told me he is just there for some experimental psycho-therapy. He sounded quite normal and cheerful."

Hillary Hardy showed up next morning at my request, and he did, indeed, appear in good spirits. I demanded, "What's this business of locking yourself up in a looney-bin? Don't you realize that's bad public relations?"

He chuckled. "I thought of that. So I'm going under an assumed name. Your girl said you had something very important to tell me."

"Sure. I want another play," I told him. "*Updraft* won't run forever, you know."

"Oh, I have plenty of money now, so I won't have to bother. The people at the sanitarium have become interested in my project, and all I'm spending is board and room there. Thanks to your royalty checks I've got quite a pile in the bank."

"Won't have to bother?" I yelled. "Here I launch you on Broadway, and that's all the gratitude I get. Now's the time to cash in on the reputation of your first play. It's setting attendance records."

"Sorry, Mr. Crocker," he said. "I'm in a critical stage of my experiments. I just can't afford the time at the moment."

"Experiments! Experiments! What is this business?"

He brightened. "Would you believe it? I've contacted memories back to three months after my birth. And at this rate I'll reach birth itself within a few weeks."

I shuddered. What a nasty ambition! "What's the percentage?"

"You don't understand." he said warming to his subject. "The further back I go the more nearly I approach total recall. At present I can contact any memory in my experience back to six months, day by day, minute by minute. I can run off these memories like colored movies, recalling every sight,

sound, smell, feel and taste."

"So what happened earlier than six months that's so important?"

"Probably nothing of great interest," Hardy granted, "but the further back I go, the more intense is the reality of all my memories. For instance, right now I can return to the day, hour, minute and second I went to school for the first time. I can remember the look on the teacher's face and hear the screams of twenty-six kindergarten kids. I can smell the freshly oiled floors and the newly painted walls. I can feel the wart on my mother's finger, the one I was holding onto for dear life."

The almost fanatic glow in his eager, young face impressed me. Realism of memory! Could that be the essence of his successful first play? Did his down-to-earth touch account for *Updraft's* surprising audience appeal?

I pleaded, "Don't let me down now, Hillary. I gambled thousands of dollars on your first play. If you can repeat we'll both enjoy an even better pay-off. Besides, have you looked into what your taxes will be?"

"Taxes? No, I really haven't, but I'm sure I have enough to last another year. Sorry, Mr. Crocker. Maybe later, but right at the moment—"

His broad-shouldered, lean athletic form drifted through my door and was gone.

Two weeks later *Parodisiac* arrived, typed on fools-cap, uncorrected, with pencil notations and coffee-spots on it, but it was byline, "Hillary Hardy," and after a single, quick scanning I was overjoyed to pay the expense of transcribing it to more durable paper. The play was powerful, witty and emotion-stirring. It was a work of art.

And on the last page was scribbled in the border: "I looked into my tax bill, and found you were right. I'm almost broke after Uncle Sam takes his cut, so here is the play you asked for. Hope you like it. (signed) H. H."

There was a P.S. "Expect to hit *birth* this week."

When I phoned him at the sanitarium, asking for Sam Buckle, the name he had left originally with Ellie, he refused to come to the phone. So I wired him, "Quit worrying about taxes. I accept your earlier offer to be your agent as well as producer. Good luck on your experiments."

Parodisiac was much too good to hold for the closing of *Updraft*. Indeed, the first play was showing no signs of weakening, so I began rounding up talent outside the original cast. This was a cinch. Meredith Crawley finished Act 1, Scene

1, and accepted the male lead without turning another page. So did Alicia Pennington, even though it meant giving up a personal appearance tour to publicize her latest Hollywood release that was supposed to win her an Oscar.

Not that I had to go after talent like this to put *Parodisiac* across. It was so potent I believe I could have made it a hit with a cast out of a burleycue revue.

The season was getting late, so I did the unthinkable. I cut normal rehearsal time in half and slammed it at the big town without even a trial run in the back-country. Nobody connected with the show objected—not even Hec Blankenship, my publicity manager. In fact it was he who suggested the sleeper treatment.

With nothing more than last-minute newspaper notices we opened the box-office to a completely uninformed public, and did it knock the critics for a loop! Only a couple showed up for the first performance, along with less than a third-full house of casual first-nighters.

PEOPLE WANDERED out stunned. A substitute drama-critic from the *Times* looked me up after the show, and there were tears of gratitude in his eyes. "My review of this play will establish my reputation," he told me. "If the boss had had any notion of what you were pulling, he'd have been here himself. But what about the author? I thought you were going to have to call the police when you failed to produce the author."

It had been rough. The skimpy crowd had milled about for a half hour screaming "Author, author!" Meanwhile, I was too choked up after the last heart-wrenching scene to get up and make a speech.

Everything had gone perfectly. Even the brief rehearsal time failed to leave any rough edges. Crawley and Pennington were so carried away with their parts that they easily doubled their considerable dramatic stature that first performance. The supporting cast caught fire, too, and, well—the likes of it is rarely seen anywhere.

The lines seemed to come out of the actors' hearts, not their mouths. Cue-lines blended with the dialogue interplay, the artificiality of stage-sets, costumery and make-up disappeared, and the simple, yet profound drama unreeled like a bolt of vividly printed silk, flowing smoothly, strongly, absorbingly to the tragic-comical climax that left the emotions reeling from the suspense and warm with relief.

Two days later I looked at the figures on advance ticket sales and could find only one conceivable

complaint. *Parodisiac* would make Hillary Hardy so much money that not even taxes could force him to produce another for a great while.

What promised to be a major irritation, fending off the press from Hardy and protecting his anonymity, was converted into a master publicity-stroke by Hec Blankenship. He swore the few of us who knew about Hardy's youth and whereabouts, to complete secrecy, then he proceeded to build his publicity around the "mystery-author."

"But he's got a past!" I objected when Hec first presented the scheme. "Old friends and relatives will spill the beans."

"Have you really looked into Hillary's past?" Hec asked.

I confessed I hadn't. Hec said that he had. It developed that Hillary Hardy was not our boy's real name. In his passion for anonymity he had been changing his name every time he changed locations, which was often. Hec had traced his background through three moves that brought the author across the country, but the trail petered out at a ranch in Wyoming where Hillary had worked a month as a cow-hand.

The mystery-author gag worked. Inside of two weeks our promotion expense dwindled to almost nothing. Columnists were fighting for the privilege of pouring out free copy on both plays. Some of their speculations as to Hardy's real identity were pretty fabulous—Winston Churchill, Noel Coward and even a certain, witty ex-presidential candidate for the Democratic party—but no one found him out, and the advance sellout began gaining a week every day.

Now, I have made and lost my share of theater fortunes, and I have learned a certain caution. At the moment I was quite content to ride with my two smash-hits and leave Hardy to his experiments. Strangely, it was he who called upon me for action.

A month after launching *Parodisiac* he showed up at my office, looking leaner and more intense than ever. His crew-cut was growing out, but it was from neglect rather than a sudden artistic temperament, I was sure.

After locking the doors and cancelling my morning appointments, I said, "Well, golden boy, what brings you to civilization?"

His smile was still strong and warm, but it was no longer youthful. There was a look of deep wisdom in his blue eyes that finally justified the magnificent play he had written.

"Money," he answered briefly.

"Haven't my checks been reaching you?" I asked in amazement.

"Oh, yes. Very gratifying," he said pacing a groove in the deep carpet pile. "But I'm moving into prenatal memory now, and I accomplished it by administrations of a new B vitamin derivative. I have a staff of biochemists working for me producing this substance, but it's fearfully expensive. I need more of it, larger lab facilities to produce it secretly. I want to buy the sanitarium."

"Buy the—"

"Lock, stock and personnel," he nodded. "I'm three months before birth, already. My goal is conception."

A big, brassy gong chimed in my brain. "That sounds like this *dianetics* business that was going the rounds awhile back."

Hardy nodded. "In some respects, yes. But I have a single goal, total recall, and I'm taking a more comprehensive approach. Psycho-therapy helped a great deal, but I have traced-out every angle of mnemonics, improved on most and invented some new ones. The final problem is one of improving synaptic potentials and actual tissue tone in the brain. Biochemistry is giving me the answers. With enough of the new B vitamin derivative I'm confident I can reach conception—and a totality of recall."

"But Hardy, what have you got when you get there? I still say, what's the percentage?"

THE LOOK he gave me was puzzled but completely tolerant. "You raved to me about my last play, yet you don't see what I'm getting at?" He stopped pacing and sat opposite me with his muscular hands knotted into fists on my desk.

"George," he said with quiet intentness, "I will be the first man since creation to have the full potential of his brain at his creative disposal."

"How do you figure that?"

"The brain has three principal functions. It can store information for recall, it can analyze and correlate this information and finally it can synthesize creatively. Now the latter two functions are inherently dependent upon the quality of the first, or memory recall. As a truly thinking animal, man considers he has reached some acme of perfection because his brain is so superior to the lower animals. Actually, the real gulf is between what man *has achieved* and what he *can achieve* with his brain.

"The key lies in perfecting his recall. What good does it do to keep pouring in information when most of us are forgetting old things almost as rapidly as we are learning new ones? Of course, we don't really ever forget anything, but our

power of exact recall grows fuzzy through disuse. Then when we need a certain name or factual bit of information we can't quite dig it up, or it comes up in distorted approximations.

"The same holds for calling on experience to help us with new problems. We may grasp the general lesson of experience, but most of the specific incidents of our lives are dulled in time. The lessons we paid dearly to learn are largely useless. So we go on making the same mistakes, paying the same penalties over and over again."

I shrugged. "Everybody would like a better memory, I suppose, but I've never known anyone to go off the deep end over it like you have. What more can you gain?"

"Can't you visualize what it would be like to have even a short life-time of knowledge and experience laid out in sharp detail of recall? Think of the new associations of thoughts and concepts that would be possible! Consider the potential for creating drama, alone! Every word ever read or spoken, every emotion ever conveyed, every gesture of anger, love, jealousy, pain, pleasure—all this raw material glittering brightly, ready to pour out in new conflicts, dramatic situations, sharp pungent dialogue—"

He made me sense his enthusiasm, but I couldn't quite feel it. Would such a tremendous ability necessarily be good? Something about its immensity frightened me, and I didn't care to consider it for my own use at all.

I said, "Don't get me wrong. If this is what's going into your playwriting, I'm all for it. And what you do with your money is your own business. What do you propose?"

"Can you absorb more of my work?" he asked abruptly.

"I'm your agent, aren't I? I'll peddle it if I can't use it myself," I told him, not that I was so eager for the broker's 10% so much as I wanted to have the pick of his output for my own productions.

I didn't know what I was taking on. He turned out his third play in just ten days. *Ten days,* I said. I read to the bottom of page two and decided to hell with peddling this one. I'd produce it myself.

Before I got into second gear on *Beach Boy,* however, Hillary sends a messenger over with *Madame President,* a satire so sharp I knew it would make *Call Me Madame* look like *Little Women.*

What do you do? There are just so many legitimate theaters in the city.

While I'm pondering this and negotiating with a Hollywood a-

gent to mayhe take *Beach Boy* off my hands, along comes *Red Rice,* an epic novel of Communist China that out-Bucked Pearl a hundred heart-wrenches to one.

One phone call sold that one to McMullin, and when they got a look at the manuscript they raised the advance to $10,000. This was not bad for a first novel, and I didn't resent my $1000 agent's fee.

Before the summer was over I was about ready to give up show business and become a one-author agent. Hillary was keeping four secretaries busy taking dictation and transcribing. He never researched, never revised, never even glanced at the copy. I've known some prolific writers, but none could grind it out like Hillary Hardy.

And it was good! Every piece was better than the last. His characters were strictly 3-D right on paper, and word pictures! When he mentioned bedbugs, you itched and bled; when the villain slugged the hero a low-blow, you felt it in your guts; and when boy got girl—brother, turn up the house-lights, quick.

I got so involved trying to produce five plays at once, making dickers with publishers and motion picture studios, fighting off television people and answering mail demanding a chance at foreign rights, that it was mid-November before I realized that it was over a month since I'd heard from the golden goose.

In fact Ellie drew my attention to it one morning. "Hadn't you better call the sanitarium?" she suggested. "Maybe he had a breakdown or something?"

The thought chilled me. Not only had I sold Hillary's complete output to date, but I had a file full of contracts for future novels and movie scripts worth a couple of million dollars.

I didn't phone-I went. To Hoboken.

In the outskirts I found his private hospital, demanded to see Sam Buckle and was told to sit down and wait. He was in therapy.

TWO HOURS later they took me to him. He lay on a hospital bed in his shorts, staring at the ceiling and the sweat all over him like he had just stepped out of a showerbath.

"Hello, George," he said, still looking at the ceiling.

"Hi, kid! You sick or something?"

He smiled a little. "The surf at Monterey. The sun fading through the low morning mist, a golden ghost peering through the somber veil—and Julia, beside me, clinging to my arm, crying softly—"

"Hey, kid, I'm in New Jersey. Where are you?" I said nervously.

He blinked. "In California, George. Two years ago. I'm there. Do you understand? *I'm really there!*"

It was a little embarrassing. I felt like an intruder on a beach picnic. "Well, Hillary, that's just fine," I stammered. "I suppose that means that—that you've done what you set out to."

"That's right." He nodded slightly. "Total recall, George. Every instant of my existence re-filed under 'urgent'. Every vision, every sound, every sensation, laid clean and sharp like a sound film ready for running. I've done it, George."

"How long ago did you—"

"Three weeks ago I began heavy dosing with the vitamin. Today—just this last hour—I reached back into prenatal to the first instant of my cellular existence. And it was like ripping a curtain aside. I—I can't exactly tell you what it's like. Something like coming out of a black cellar into the noon-day sun. It's almost blinding."

He closed his eyes, squinting as though to shut out a glare. His blond hair had grown long, and it lay on the pillow like a woman's. He had lost some weight, and except for the heavy chest muscles and thick forearms, he had the appearance of a poet, a delicate soul dedicated to some ephemeral plane out of this world.

I figured I'd better provide a little ballast. "Congratulations and all that," I said, "but what about your work?"

"I'm done," he said quietly.

"Done? Are you forgetting that you bought a sanitarium?—some eight hundred grand worth? And it's only half paid for?"

"Oh, that. The royalities will take care of the payments."

"Hillary, you keep forgetting about taxes."

"Then let them take it back by default. I'm through with it."

"Dammit," I said, "I looked into this deal. People don't take back sanitariums like over-ripe bananas, especially when they got you on the hook for more than it's worth. They'll hold you to the contract. And you can't get your equity out if you don't protect it by keeping up your payments. You have a wonderful start, and if you just fill the contracts I have on file now you can pay it off and have plenty left to retire on. But right now you aren't so solvent, boy."

Well, he finally came out of his trance long enough to agree to fulfill the commitments I'd made for him, and I thought that once he got started there would be no holding him.

Just to make sure I did some-

thing on my own. I let his identity and whereabouts leak out.

It was a sneaky thing to do to him, but I figured that once he got a real taste of the fame that was waiting him he would never let go of it.

The papers splashed it: "Mystery Genius Is Lad of 19!"

They swamped him. They swarmed over him and plastered him with honorary literary degrees, domestic and foreign. They Oscared him and Nobelled him. They wined, dined and adored him into a godhead of the arts.

The acting, publishing, TV, radio and movie greats paid homage to his genius by the most hysterical bidding for his talents their checkbooks could support. I kept waiting for the Secretary of the Treasury to present him with the key to Fort Knox.

Meanwhile, I waited patiently —having no choice, since I started the publicity nightmare myself—for the earthquake to settle down. As his agent I was holding off all new commitments until he fulfilled the ones on hand.

Six months passed, and Hillary was still wallowing in glory, too busy sopping up plaudits to bother turning a hand.

Finally I sent a goon squad after him and dragged him to my office. He arrived in a four-hundred dollar suit and a fifty-dollar tie. Each cuff was decorated by a diamond link and a Hollywood starlet. I shooed out the excess and came to the point.

"Recess is over," I said gently. "Now we settle down for a few months of patty-cake with your secretaries. They're here in my offices now where I can keep an eye on things. Okay?"

He grinned his old happy smile, and some of the dewey glaze seemed to peel from his eyes. "You're right, George," he said much to my surprise. "I can't coast forever—and believe me, I never visualized what this would be like. It's wonderful. The world is at my feet, George. At my feet!"

I had pegged him right. But after all, who could resist the accolade he had received? For all his monomania on this business of mnemonics, he was a red-blooded boy with active glands and youthful corpuscles.

To my further delight he threw off his imported suit-coat and said, "I'm ready right now. Where do we start?"

I BROACHED the file and studied my priority list. "First off, Oscar wants a play. That'll take a week or two, I suppose. Then I have an assignment for a serial—"

I outlined about three months

work for him, or what would have been three months work last summer.

I moved him into my own penthouse apartment upstairs and herded him to work the next morning. My squad of strong-arms guarded all entrances, and Hec Blankenship finally convinced the puhlic that we meant business in getting a little privacy for our tame genius so he could hatch some more immortal works.

I had lunch sent in to him in the next office and didn't see him until five that first evening. I went in without knocking. One secretary was filing her nails, and the other three were putting on their coats. The covers were still on the typewriters and Hillary was asleep or in a coma over in the corner.

I kicked his feet off his desk, and he rocked forward. "Come on upstairs, I'll buy you a steak," I said.

He smiled weakly, "I need one. It didn't go so good." In the elevator he added, "In fact, it didn't go at all."

"Take it easy," I assured him. "You're a little rusty, that's all. What about the total recall? Is it still working?"

He nodded, but he didn't say any more about it.

Next day I stuck my head in before I went to lunch, and I congratulated myself on not pushing him too hard the first day. Hillary was off in his corner again, but his mouth was moving and all four girls were doing the things that secretaries do when they are about two hours behind in their work.

Eight days later the thing dropped on my desk. I wet a finger with keen anticipation, but the spit wasn't dry before I was plowing into Hillary's office trailing loose sheets.

"Are you kidding?" I yelled.

He was out of his chair over by the window staring out. All he did was hunch up his shoulders. The girls were standing around trying to act invisible.

"Hillary," I said trying to laugh. "Don't be playing gags on old George. Where is it? Where's Oscar's play?"

"I—I'm afraid that's it," he said without turning his head.

"This—this fluff? This pablum?"

"Well—I thought I'd try something light to begin with."

"Light? This is no play. This is Pollyanna. It's been done. Where's your conflict? Your problem? Your suspense? Dammit, where's your characters?"

"I'll get warmed up tomorrow," Hilliary said, but he didn't have much conviction in his voice.

He tried. He really did. I heard him thrashing around for a whole

hour the next morning. By afternoon he was on his way to the hospital in an ambulance with two men holding him down.

All I could get out of the doctors was, "complete nervous breakdown." I finally found a hard-up intern and bribed him to spy for me. He reported that Hillary had the whole staff stumped. He was acting more like a dope addict with withdrawal symptoms or a drunk with the D.T.'s.

I got in touch with Hillary's sanitarium. The head psychiatrist was in Europe, so I cabled him and flew him back. He took over, and pretty soon I had the word I dreaded.

"Your wonder boy will recover," he told me, "but that's a wonder in itself. I presume he told you of his experiments to achieve total recall?"

I said yes.

"What he probably failed to tell you was that we all tried to dissuade him."

"That he didn't mention, but I worried about it."

"Yes, well you might have. When Hillary Hardy succeeded in stripping away the last remnant of protective insulation in his memory he exposed himself not only to its full factual content, but also he lay naked every past emotional upset, every pain, fear, dread and sorrow he had ever experienced. It is no longer possible for him to recall an experience and ponder it objectively. *He relives it.*"

"Yes, I get that," I said, "but what's so—"

"Did you ever hit your thumb with a hammer?" the doctor with the traditional, gray goatee interrupted.

"Sure, a couple of times."

"Ever lose a sweetheart or have a loved one die?"

I nodded.

"Suppose that to even think about such experiences you had to endure all the actual physical or emotional pain of the original incident? The crushing blow of the hammer? The heartache and tears of your loss? And suppose further, that you were trying to write a play, and in order to bring genuine emotion to it you forced yourself to endure these pains and emotional stresses, minute after minute—"

"God!" I said. "But you said he'd recover?"

"In a few weeks, yes. Gradually we will reduce sedation until he can control his memories again, but never ask him to write another dramatic work. Another attack like this one could drive him irretrievably insane."

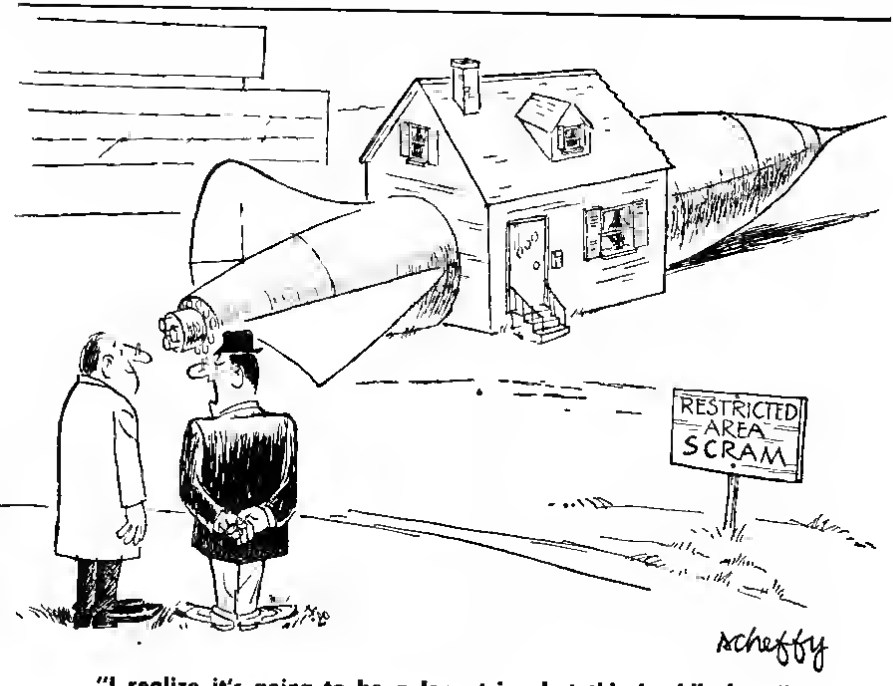
It wasn't too hard to understand. After all, what is creative writing but setting down little bits

of yourself? And the demands of literature are for human problems, conflicts, struggles.

Young as he was, Hillary was no different from the rest of us. Sure, he was full of reading and second hand bits of business, but be dug deeply into his own private pot of pain for his genuine dramatic effects And where others dig with a long-handled ladle, Hillary dipped with his bare soul—and he got scalded.

Getting him well and keeping him that way was a matter of putting the lid back on the pot, so to speak. Nobody ever invited bim to write another word. I saw to that. He's still with me, because after he went bankrupt on the sanitarium deal be bad nowhere to turn. After taxes and the rooking the real estate boys gave him, his royalties were tied up for years to come.

He did get better, though. And he even works a little. Turns out scripts for mild little comic books, the Honey-Bunney type that are approved by parent-teacher censors. They don't sell very well. No conflict. No guts.



"I realize it's going to be a long trip—but this is ridiculous!"

Morgan's Lucky Planet

by

Lloyd Biggle, Jr.

He never worried very much about police traps, for space cops were suckers and he was lucky. Now he had another chance to prove it!

HAARN'S FIELD. A shabby, trash-littered, converted junk pasture thirty miles from the center of Barimus City.

The field lay peacefully serene under the bright light of Barimus' twin moons. A single ship silently pointed its dark silhouette upwards. Radiation scars glowed softly luminous in the moonlight. The *hilp* weed, a scraggly plant that persisted in growing where no living thing ought to survive, was in bloom, its small white blossoms whipping in fitful gusts of wind.

A rumbling drone sounded from the direction of Barimus City, the noise rising and falling on the tossing wind. An air car topped a low hill, followed by another, and another—six, eight, ten air cars, unlighted, hugging the ground as they raced at maximum velocity. Light flashed suddenly as a door to the weather-worn control shack jerked open. A man darted out, sprinted at a half crouch along the rickety board fence, leaped a radiation scar, and scurried up the ship's ramp.

The ramp was moving jerkily upward as the first air car swooped down and screeched to a halt. Men poured out, uniformed men, grimly alert and with weapons pointing menacingly at the ship. They fanned out and ran forward as the ramp disappeared and the air lock clanged shut.

For a moment nothing happened. Abruptly the ground glowed white beneath the ship, and searing radiation drove the men back as the ship plummeted upwards. The flaming jets dwindled to a pinpoint, and vanished.

★ ★ ★

District Commissioner Erness, of the Interplanetary Police, sat sphinx-like behind his desk, and

D. BRUCE BERRY

stared at a thick dossier that lay unopened before him. Senior Lieutenant Hallin stood respectfully at attention, watching Erness, and stealing an occasional glance at the clock.

Erness spoke without looking up. "Seemed proud of the fact that they only missed him by thirty seconds. Hell! Might as well miss him by a week. He got away. Your squadron alerted?"

"Ready to leave in fifteen minutes. What about Haarn?"

"He's covered himself. Morgan gave him forged papers. Or maybe Haaran supplied the papers. Anyway, he has them on file, and it's a good forgery. We couldn't make a charge stick."

"How'd we happen to spot Morgan?"

Erness sighed. "One of our transferees from Sirius recognized him. Our own men wouldn't know him, of course. Probably his first trip here, though you can never tell about those things. I'm inclined to believe it was. He didn't think anyone would know him, and he was acting pretty confident. We should have had him. But he has some kind of instinct . . ."

"Or luck," Hallin said.

"Yes. Calls himself 'Lucky Morgan,' you know. No one knows better than I that he deserves the name. Well, that's the story. We had the galaxy's number one wanted man sitting on our laps, and he went tripping lightly away." Erness slumped backwards, an old man who had absorbed one defeat too many. "Never told anyone about this, Hallin. I came up as an S-Man. Twenty years an S-Man."

"I've heard rumors about that," Hallin said, stealing another glance at the clock.

"Twenty years an S-Man, working out of Police Central, and fifteen of those years I had just one assignment—Morgan. I came close a few times, like we did tonight. But never close enough. God, how I've hated that man!" His white hands clenched and unclenched slowly. He fingered the thick dossier. "Five hundred men, women and children starved to death on Wornia, Hallin. Colonists, and Morgan pirated their supplies. An epidemic killed two thousand on Lakin. Morgan had a modest profit from peddling them a condemned milk shipment."

He slammed the dossier down angrily. "I've never married, Hallin. I was engaged once. Before I joined the S-Corps. She was a lovely girl, young, beautiful—and Morgan kidnapped her along with five others from a government reception in Galaxia. We were a year finding her, and by then she was a disease-wracked mental case. She

died a few months later . . ." His voice broke. Suddenly be sprang erect, his gaunt face tense, fury flashing in his dark eyes. "Hallin, at least a hundred planets want Morgan. Let's get him!"

"Right," Hallin said, and they started towards the door.

IN SPACE, Erness sat quietly in his quarters, eyes closed, Morgan's dossier resting on his lap. He nodded when Hallin burst in excitedly.

"What is it, Hallin?"

"We have an X-beam on Morgan."

"Sure it's Morgan?"

"Positive. It's the only ship . . ."

"All right. This is what I want you to do."

A simple plan. Five ships forming a long crescent across space, the tips curved in towards the fugitive. Morgan just might concentrate his attention on the single ship directly behind him, and if he did try to maneuver, he'd move into the path of an outlying ship.

They had the new X-beam, now too, and they could track Morgan at greater distances without his being aware of them.

"Message from headquarters," Hallin said. "Rumor has it that some strum joints have acquired girls from Maron. The bidding is said to be running high. They're doing what tbey can, of course. May rescue a few of tbem."

"It figures," Erness said. "Morgan wouldn't make tbe run to Barimus for the fun of it. As soon as we're in position, put a tracer beam on him."

Hallin winced. "Supposing he has a detector!"

"Then be'll do something very clever."

★ ★ ★

Lucky Morgan lay back comfortably on the cushioned pilot seat, and lazily wriggled his bare toes at the scanner screen. Tbe awe-inspiring depths of space did not awe Morgan. He loathed space. He detested planet hopping. He hated space ships, though he lavished a mother's tender care on bis own. It was a necessary tool of his trade.

Morgan had recently learned, by bitter experience, tbat a man with a price on his bead can never absolutely trust his associates. Now he was going it alone, and his success made him scratcb the hairy barrel of his chest gleefully as he did mental arithmetic on his profits.

He bad delivered sixty Maron girls, artfully kidnapped and drugged for transporting. Any woman brought a good price on Barimus.

Morgan delivered his girls, and loaded his ship with five hundred cases of contraband liquor. Tbe

liquor he would smuggle into Orindo, where a strict embargo was maintained. The natives loved it, though it was said to have a devastating effect on their nervous systems. On Orindo he would take on a load of grif, a sinister, habit-forming narcotic. He would deliver the grif to Maron, where he already had a dope ring organized, and pick up another load of girls for Barimus.

Maron girls for Barimus, Barimus liquor for Orindo, and Orindo dope for Maron. Twelve times around that circle, and he would be several times a millionaire. Twenty-four times, and he would be one of the wealthiest men in the galaxy. He hadn't decided whether to stop at twelve, or try for twenty-four.

He wriggled his toes languidly at the scanner screen, thought about the unexpected descent of the police on Haarn's Field, and snickered. As police operations went, it had been a fairly efficient one—which could mean that Erness was now District Commissioner on Barimus, as he'd heard.

Ping! said his instrument panel.

Morgan's squat body snapped to alertness. He stared incredulously at the flickering red light. "Beamed!"

He leaped to his feet, shuffled around the control room, and returned to stare at the light. It snapped off with a dull click, and Morgan collapsed on the cushions, laughing.

All right. They knew who he was, and they knew where he was. Old Erness was due for another lesson from Lucky Morgan, and Morgan would give it to him—with pleasure!

He noted the time, and worked quickly over his instrument panel. One ship, small, probably a patrol ship. He'd let it come a little closer, and then he'd show it what the *Squab* could do. He relaxed, and counted off the minutes. Forty, fifty . . .

Ping! said his detector.

"Every hour on the hour," Morgan grunted.

Thirty minutes, forty, fifty . . .

Ping!

Morgan altered his course three degrees, and did another check on the patrol ship. "Funny," he mused. "It should be making better time than that. Doesn't even seem to be trying to catch me. Just following . . ."

Sixty minutes. Sixty-one. Sixty-two . . .

Ping!

Morgan chuckled, and corrected his course. "A little while finding me again, weren't you? We'll see how you do this time."

Sixty minutes. Sixty-five . . .

Ping!

Morgan slapped his side, and guffawed heartily. "Slow. Space Patrol isn't what it used to be."

He did a quick check on the position of the pursuing ship, and slumped scowling onto the cushions. "Still just following me. I *know* it can make better time than that. I wonder . . ."

He scrambled to his feet and worked feverishly over his detector. "What d'ya know!" he exclaimed. "Four—five ships. One acting as decoy while the rest try to circle around and trap me. I'll stop this nonsense."

He altered his course ten degrees, and switched on full power, twisting in agony as the crushing impact of acceleration caught his body. But he thought kind thoughts about the engineer on Sirius who had remodeled his old freighter for him. It had a few gadgets the Space Patrol would like to know about. In fact, quite a few.

His detector pinged again at ninety minutes. A hundred and forty minutes more and it pinged—weakly. Morgan forced his pain-wracked body erect, and worked feebly over his detector. He saw with satisfaction that his pursuers were now moving at top speed, and being rapidly left behind. He clenched his fists and watched the clock. The detector remained silent. Finally, with fumbling fingers, he shoved a hypodermic needle into his arm and fell back into a drugged sleep.

When he awoke, six hours later, he could find no trace of the patrol ships. He was out of detector range. He cut his speed down to a level of mild discomfort, set a new course on Orindo, and lay back to stare at his wriggling toes.

"That'll teach them to tangle with Lucky Morgan," he said contentedly.

MORGAN ENJOYED nothing but the best kind of luck. He stoutly refused to acknowledge the existence of a negative kind. So when, twenty-four hours later, a meteor holed his ship and crashed through the control room, he never thought of it as bad luck. He merely considered it an accident.

He came to—how much later he did not know—and found himself lying in a pool of blood fighting feebly to keep on breathing. Pantingly he struggled to his feet and groped his way to the instrument panel. His oxygen meter stood at zero. His emergency reserve stood at near zero, as his air machine hissed in a frantic effort to establish a normal atmosphere, and poured its life-giving substance off into space.

Morgan staggered to the ma-

chine, took three deep breaths of pure oxygen, and cut it off. Moving carefully, he climbed into a space suit, and fitted a patch to the gaping hole in the ship's side.

That done, he settled dejectedly on the pilot's seat, and studied the oxygen meter. He was weak from loss of hlood, and the top of his head was a sticky, oozing mess. He could pipe the remaining oxygen reserve into his space suit, and he might keep going for twelve hours —fifteen, if he was lucky. He'd heen thrown off course, and he had no idea now long it might take to establish his position.

"An accident can happen to anyone," he told himself grimly. "When it does, a man is either lucky, or he isn't. Up to now, Morgan's been lucky."

Anxiously he worked at the scanner screen. He was fourteen hours at maximum speed from the nearest sun. He was two hundred and seventy hours from the next-nearest. He saw no planets circling either sun.

"A man's either lucky, or he isn't," Morgan said. "Morgan's lucky. There'll he a planet."

He pointed the *Squab* at the nearest sun, and switched on full power.

The *Squab* arced high over the sun, and there was a planet. An oxygen planet. Morgan's lucky planet. The *Squab* swooped downward, and Morgan, gasping on the last of his oxygen reserve, stumbled out the airlock and filled his lungs with the thin but breathahle air.

He set his air machine to compressing oxygen. He bathed and bandgaged his wounded head. He took time to eat. Refreshed, he hoisted himself up the outside of the ship, and installed a plate over the jagged rent left hy the meteor.

Breathing heavily, he returned to the control room, and checked the purring air machine. "Take some time to get much oxygen out of *this* atmosphere," he said. "But I'd better fill up the tanks. If I hadn't had a reserve, out there . . ."

But he'd had a reserve. He was lucky. And this was Morgan's lucky planet. "Mayhe there'll be something more than oxygen here," he told himself. "Mayhe I'll be *real* lucky."

Anyway, he had some time to waste. He walked down the ramp, and looked ahout him.

He'd hardly noticed the planet as he came in, except to see that it was harren and uninhabited. He'd paid no attention to his surroundings while he repaired the ship. Now he stopped short, and stared in amazement.

The lifeless land stretched off towards the horizon, starved and

dismal, baking under the feeble heat of a red dwarf sun. The brittle ground cracked sickeningly as he ventured one uneasy step forward. A hundred yards away a tree stump stretched its tortured shape upwards, dead and branchless, contorted like a man in agony. One mound-like hill thrust itself bleakly above the horizon. A dull odor of decay filled his nostrils.

Morgan took another step, and again the ground cracked under his weight. "Hell," he said. "Dried mud. So it must rain sometime. There's an ocean." Another step and he paused to kick the ground disgustedly. "Don't nothing grow here?"

He looked at the ship, shrugged, and struck out for the lone, beckoning hill. He was sick of the ship. He was sick of space. He needed some exercise. He'd climb that hill, and see what he could see. And if he didn't find anything, it was still his lucky planet. It had saved his life. Otherwise, that freak meteor would have accomplished more than the police of a good many planets. It would have eliminated Lucky Morgan.

His shadow lengthened as he walked jauntily onward. He hesitated, looked back at the friendly, towering shape of his ship, and trudged on. "I'll leave in the morning," he said. "If I'm going to take a look, it'll have to be now."

The hill was farther away than he had thought. It stood out starkly against the sunset as he approached it. He looked upwards, surprised at its steepness, and cautiously edged his way towards the top. In the distance—nothing. Flat, barren landscape. The dusky outline of another hill. Night was coming on swiftly, and behind him he could see the cheerful blinking of his air lock light.

"Better go back," he muttered. "What a hell of a world this is!"

Half walking, half sliding, he descended. The drooping, clinging blackness of a moonless night had enfolded him by the time he reached the bottom. He stood for a moment, looking about to orientate himself, straining his eyes for the flashing light. Then he swore in amazement. There was no light.

"Couldn't have gone out," he muttered. "Maybe if I climbed—but no. On this planet I could see that light for miles."

IN THE END, he edged back up the hill, and searched again. There was no light.

"I'll start back anyway," he said. "If I can't find the ship in the dark, I'll find it as soon as morning comes. It can't get away." He chuckled grimly, and started out.

An hour passed. Two hours. He had no idea how far he had walked. He was tired. He was also hungry and thirsty. In the intense darkness he knew he could walk right past the ship without seeing it.

"Better wait until morning, now," he said. "I must be getting close."

He stretched out on the ground, hunched himself around uncomfortably, and finally dozed off.

He awoke with a start, and lay listening to the moaning wind. Suddenly he jerked erect, his hands clutching the encrusted earth in terror. There was no wind. The air hung motionless about him with a stifling reek of death.

The moaning ceased abruptly as he sat up. He stared into the blackness, saw nothing, heard nothing. He relaxed, moved his hands, and his sense of touch brought him to his feet with a sobbing, choking scream. He had felt life pulsing beneath him.

He knelt, and passed his hands cautiously along the ground. Grass had pushed up through the hardened mud where he had lain. He felt the soft, caressing blades, swore savagely, and felt again.

"I'll be damned. Stuff *grows* here at night!"

He moved a few feet away, and knelt again. The ground was hard and barren to his touch. He crouched for a long time, his palms flat on the cracked earth. Finally he stretched out to doze fitfully. He awoke with a whispering moan in his ears, and there was grass beneath him. He moved again, and sat tensely erect until the darkness began to fade.

In the first light of dawn, he got to his feet and moved forward, searching the horizon. Behind him he could see the hill he had climbed the previous evening. Ahead of him he made out the towering shape of his ship. But as he moved on, and it grew lighter, the outline blurred. He stopped short with a gasp of dismay. He was walking towards another hill.

He stared for a few minutes before he remembered. From the hill he had climbed, he had seen another hill. And somehow he had gotten turned around and headed in the wrong direction.

"Stupid," he muttered. "Should have waited for morning." He turned, and wearily retraced his steps. He reached the hill, studied it anxiously, and—yes, it was the one he'd climbed. The marks of his descent were there, faint, almost obliterated, somebow, but there. He moved around it and looked for his ship. And saw nothing.

Ahead of him, on the far horizon, was a hill. Behind him was the hill

he'd mistaken for his ship. Dispairing, he slumped to the ground. His head was throbbing painfully. He was still weak from the blood he'd lost, and from lack of sleep. Hunger pangs stabbed at him, and thirst burned his mouth.

"Stupid," he said. "Should have brought food and water. Should never have left the sbip—with it getting dark, too. Well—any man can make a foolish mistake, and then he's either lucky or he isn't. I'm lucky."

He knew that somewhere on this planet was his ship. He knew it should be within walking distance. So he would walk to the nearest hill, and climb it. And if he couldn't see the ship, he'd retrace his steps and walk to the farthest hill and climb that—and one of them would be the right one.

He started out. stumbling often, now, cursing the heat of his tight bandages, licking his parched lips, kicking angrily at the hardened mud. He lost track of time as he plodded forward, wearily moving one foot ahead of the other. He reached the hill, and climbed it on his hands and knees.

And saw nothing—nothing but the barren landscape stretching into the distance as far as he could see. Not even another hill to break the monotony.

"So I came the wrong way," he said finally. "So—I'll go back."

He fell on the way down, and rolled sobbing to the bottom. He lay there for a long time, wishing for a bit of shade to rest in, wishing for a roaring river to cross, wishing . . .

Night found him stumbling onward, delirious, no longer certain of his direction, but moving. He fell often. His thirst was a searing flame in his moutb. He collapsed, finally, and lost himself in a feverish sleep.

The moaning was thunder in his ears when he awoke. Grass crowded around him, caressing, clutching. He lay staring upwards into the darkness, trying to remember what had happened. Tben he started to get up, and the twining grass held his arms and legs like bands of steel. He struggled weakly and fell back. and felt the sure. swift growth encircle his throat.

DISTRICT COMMISSIONER Erness had problems. He paced nervously back and forth, squinting at the desolate landscape. watching the slow distant progress of a searching flyer. "Hallin," he called over his shoulder, "just tell me why. Morgan couldn't know about the X-beam. He'd think he'd completely outrun us. He would have anyway, in another forty-eight hours. And then he suddenly

changes course and plops down in a dried-up mud hole. You tell me why."

"Maybe he got off again," Hallin said, "though I don't know how."

"He couldn't fool the X-beam. We both know he landed. He landed within fifty miles of this spot, and he stayed landed. Now where the hell's his ship? And why would he put down here, anyway? No fauna, and no flora worth mentioning. Morgan isn't going out of his way to land on a planet with no profit in sight."

"Emergency?" Hallin suggested.

"Possibly. But then his ship would be setting here, with him making repairs. There's no place for him to hide it. You couldn't hide an old shoe on this planet, unless you buried it. This is going to make a damned peculiar report, Hallin."

Hallin was staring at the steep, probing contour of a distant hill. "Buried it," he murmured. "I wonder—Commissioner, the flyers haven't given us anything but three hours of negative reports. I'm going to take one of the crews, and do a little prospecting."

They attacked the crown of the hill, with Erness looking on quizically. An hour later spades clunked against metal. Another hour, and the pock-marked side of the buried ship showed a name: *Stellar Queen.*

"Stellar Queen!" Erness exclaimed. "That wasn't Morgan's ship, unless—Hallin!"

Hallin was already running towards the flyer. By the time he returned with a report from Barimus, the ship's air lock had been uncovered, and Erness sat in the captain's quarters pouring over the logbook. "It figures," he said to Hallin. "The *Stellar Queen* disappeared somewhere in this sector three years ago. The log describes an emergency landing, exploration parties that went out and didn't come back, and then—nothing. I'd say the Bureau of Exploration better give this planet a good going over. There may be something here besides dried mud."

"Interesting," Hallin said. "How do you suppose the ship got buried? Maybe when this place gets dry enough, the dirt blows around. But it would take a lot of blowing to cover a ship in three years, and I doubt if blowing could produce a near-perfect cone. Except for the top being rounded off, you couldn't do a much better job with precision instruments."

"Interesting," Erness agreed. "But it doesn't help us find Morgan."

They stared at each other. Hallin said slowly, "I've spotted five more

hills like this one. Do you suppose . . ."

"I wouldn't be a bit surprised."

In the second hill was the *Pegasus,* which had disappeared without trace twenty-seven years before. In the third hill was an auxiliary cruiser, the *Spica,* lost in an obscure naval engagement of the previous century. In the fourth hill was Morgan's *Squab* and five hundred cases of contraband whiskey.

Erness prowled through the ship, scowled darkly at the folded bunks that had held the unfortunate Maron girls, and carefully scrutinized the label on a bottle of whiskey.

He made his way to the control room, and wearily sat down on Morgan's cushioned pilot seat. "All right," he said. "I don't understand what natural forces could have done it, but I can concede that in time a space ship might be buried. I'll even concede that it might be buried under a perfect cone. I *can't* see how all these ships got buried to a uniform depth of ten feet above the nose, regardless of how long they've been here, and I certainly can't see how it happened to Morgan's ship in seventy-two hours."

Hallin studied the blank scanner screen. "The world's my oyster," he said, and quickly added, "Someone wrote that."

"So?"

"Drop a grain of sand in an oyster. It resents it, and covers it with a pearl. Drop a space ship on a planet—supposing the planet resents it? Wonder if the mud covering these ships would analyze any different from mud in general around here."

Erness looked up in amazement. "You mean the planet's alive? Nonsense!"

They went out the air lock, and Erness took a last look at Morgan's ship, and shuddered. It's beyond me. We'll turn it over to Exploration—and they're welcome to it."

Hallin said thoughtfully, "Maybe it's a good thing we left our ships in their orbits. I'd better tell the men to keep an eye on the flyers. And the sooner we get off this planet, the better I'll like it."

"If we just knew what happened to Morgan . . ."

The flyer circled outward from Morgan's ship, skimming low over the flat landscape. "No place for a man to hide," Erness muttered, "and he couldn't last forever without food and water. He's probably spotted one of the flyers. Funny he wouldn't give himself up. Unless confederates got him off, but then the X-beam would have caught them."

"Look!" Hallin shouted, clutch-

ing his arm.

They circled back, landed, and stood silently beside an irregular patch of waist-high yellow grass. Erness took a deep breath, strode through it, and kicked the rippling blades disgustedly. "The only place we've seen where a man *could* hide. And there's nothing here."

Hallin broke off a stalk of grass, and crumpled it in his fingers. "Dead," he said.

Erness took a deep breath, strode ing how pathetically different this defeat was from all the others he'd suffered. As a younger man, he'd been able to shrug off defeat and come roaring back. As an old man, he was just— beaten. "Hallin," he said, "I'm not a religious man, but I've always thought whatever Gods there may be would not let me die without knowing that man's gotten what's coming to him. And now . . ."

They returned to the flyer. Hallin looked back to watch the grass flatten out in the wake of their takeoff. "That's odd," he mused. "Except for a couple of dead trees, it's the only sign we've seen of anything growing on this planet. Hundreds of square miles of dried mud, and one small patch where grass grows. It almost looks as if it was—well, *fertilized.*"

THE END

★ Norbert Wiener — Mathematician ★

IT IS AN ODD, almost un-understandable fact, that America has been singularly lax in honoring its great scientists and mathematicians. True, there have not been many of them, but that is all the more reason why a Josiah Willard Gibbs, an Osgood, or a Wiener should be so honored. Engineers and doers, we honor but not the scientists and mathematicians - - at least in the eye of the general public.

That this is clear, without complaint, comes in the current biography "I Am A Mathematician" by the currently active Norbert Wiener.

The name of Norbert Wiener probably does not mean much to many people, but in the abtruse sort of reasoning he did, he laid the foundations of much of the profoundly important work in "information theory."

Engineers soon use the tools given them by scientists and mathematicians. Radar, servomechanism theory, and many other branches of modern applied technology rest on the mental handi-work of Wiener who, during the Twenties and Thirties prepared the way for much stepped-up scientific output.

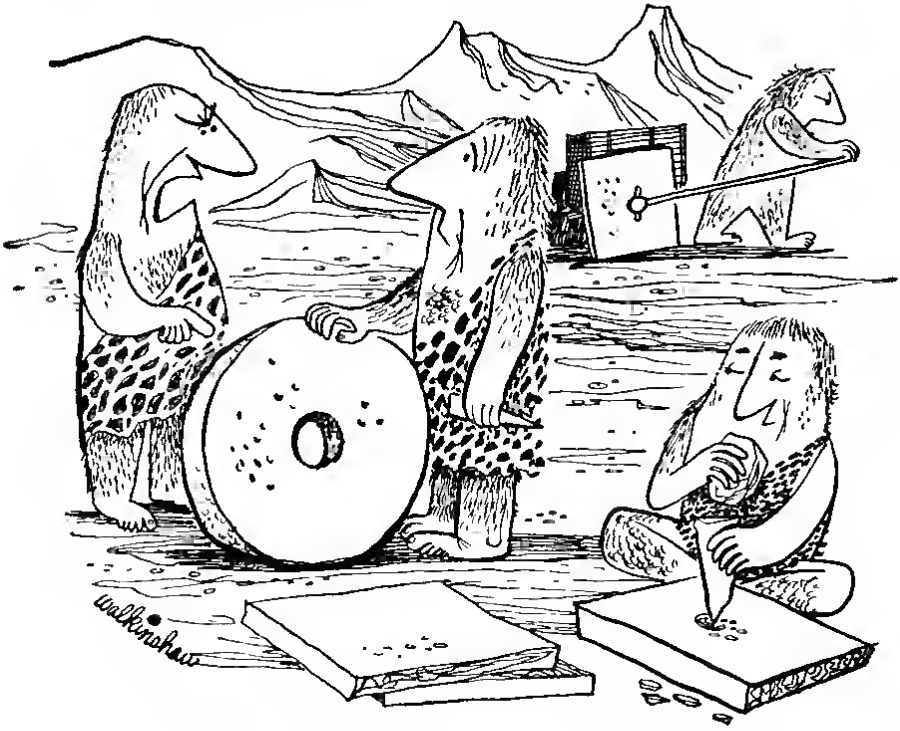
Wiener's career, aside from his mathematical accomplishments, is a fascinating thing to consider. He got his Ph.D. when he was seven-

teen. He was a child prodigy in mathematics and languages, and his stern father disciplined him into the path of the student.

Much of Wiener's work failed to receive recognition here and he sought that recognition in Europe. But when the war clouds came, he was back in this country working in the famed radiation laboratories at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The art of automation, the techniques of "cybernetics" -- these are the product of Wiener's theoretical seekings. Wiener is in no sense an engineer or applied scientist -- at least by direction -- but his pure mathematical researches turned out to have a thousand times the utility of the grubber in the field of applied math.

The future progress of science rests on our developing this type of thinker. And that will require that the public learn to value the activity of the scientist a bit above that of the movie star -- or at least comparable with it! You can't buy genius . . .



"This is the third one you've ruined this week."

Mattup had killed a man, so it was logical he should be punished. It was Danny who came up with the idea of leaving him with the prophecy —

Goodbye, Dead Man!

by

Tom W. Harris

IT WAS ORLEY Mattup's killing of the old lab technician that really made us hate him.

Mattup was a guard at the reactor installation at Bayless, Kentucky, where my friend Danny Hern and I were part of the staff when the Outsiders took everything over. In what god-forsaken mountain hole they had found Mattup, and how they got him to sell out to them, I don't know. He was an authentic human, though. You can tell an Outsider.

Mattup and Danny and I were playing high-low-jack the night Uncle Pete was killed, sitting on the widewalk where Mattup had a view of the part of the station he was responsible for. High-low-jack is a back-country card game; Danny had learned it in northern Pennsylvania, where he came from, and Mattup loved the game, and they had taught it to me because the game is better three-handed. The evening sessions had been Danny's idea—I think he figured it might give him a line on Mattup.

On the night in question, Mattup was on a week's losing streak and was in a foul humor. He was superstitious, and he had called for a new deck twice that evening and walked around his seat four different times. His bidding was getting wilder.

"You'd better cool down," Danny told him. "Thing to do is ride out the bad luck, not fight it."

Orley picked his nose and looked at his cards, "Bid four," he growled.

Four is the highest possible bid. Tim played his cards well and he had good ones. He had sewed up three of his points when we heard somebody moving around down on the reactor floor. It was old Uncle Pete Barker, one of the technicians.

"What you want down there?" bawled Mattup.

"Just left my cap by the control room," said Uncle Pete, "and thought I'd go get it."

"You keep the hell away from there," grunted Mattup.

Uncle Pete stopped and stood gazing up at us. We went on playing. It was the last card of the hand, and would either win the game for Mattup or lose it for him. Orley slapped his card down; it was a crucial card, the jack. Danny took it with a queen and Mattup had lost the game.

I felt like clearing out. Mattup's face was purple and his eyes looked like wolves' eyes. He glared at Danny, making a noise in his throat, and then I saw his gaze leave Danny and go to something down by the reactor.

It was Uncle Pete, shuffling

along toward the control room.

Mattup didn't say a word. He stood up and unholstered the thing the Outsiders had given him and pointed it at Uncle Pete. There was a ringing in our ears and Uncle Pete began to twist. Something inside him twisted him, twisting inside his arms, his legs, head, trunk, even his fingers. It was only for a few seconds. Then the ringing stopped, and Uncle Pete sunk to the ground, and there was the silence and the smell.

Mattup made us leave the body there until we had played two more hands. Danny won one; he was a man with good nerves. When we were back in our room he said, "That did it—I'm going to get that guy."

"I hate his big thick guts," I said, buttoning my pajama shirt, "but how are you going to get him?"

"I'll get him," said Danny. "Meanwhile, we'll keep playing cards."

Things went on almost normally at the Bayless reactor. It was a privately-owned pool-type reactor, and we were sent samples of all sorts of material for irradiation from all over the country. Danny was one of the irradiation men; I generally handled controlling. The Outsiders had filled the place with telescreens and guards, and all mail was opened, hut there was no real interference with the work. I began to worry a little about Danny. Almost every afternoon he spent an hour alone in our room, with the door closed.

Mattup kept getting worse; an animal with power. He used to go hunting with the damnable Outsider weapon, although the meat killed with it wasn't fit to eat, and he used it on birds until there wasn't one left anywhere near the plant. He never killed a bluebird, though. He said it was bad luck. Sometimes he drank moonshine corn liquor, usually alone, because the Outsiders wouldn't touch it, but sometimes he made some of us drink with him, watching sharply to see we didn't poison him and craftily picking his nose. When he was drunk he was abusive.

ONE NIGHT we were in our room, dead for sleep after a long game, and Danny said, "Let me show you something."

He shuffled the cards, I cut, and he dealt me an ace, king, queen, jack, ten and deuce of spades. He shuffled again and dealt me the same in hearts.

"Watch as closely as you can," he grinned. "See if you can catch me."

I couldn't.

"I've been practicing," he said.

"I'm going to get Mattup."

"What good will it do to beat him in cards? You'll only make him sore." I was relieved to learn what Danny had been doing, alone in our room, but this card-sharp angle didn't make much sense to me.

"Who says I'm going to beat him at cards?" smiled Danny. "By the way, did you hear the rumor? They're going to break up the staff, Outsider policy, send us to Oak Ridge, Argonne, Shippingport, send new people down here."

"That doesn't leave you much time," I said.

"Time enough," said Danny.

The next night Mattup began a fantastic streak of luck. It seemed he couldn't lose, and he was as unpleasant a winner as he was a loser.

"You boys don't know what card-playin' is," he'd gloat. "Think you're pretty smarty with all that science stuff but you can't win a plain old card game. You know why you can't beat me, boys?"

"Because you're too smart, I guess," said Danny.

"Well, yeah, and somethin' else. I dipped my hands in spunk water, up on the mountain where you can never find it, and besides that I spit on ever' card in this deck and wiped it off. Couldn't lose now to save my life."

"Maybe you're right," said Danny, and went on dealing.

In a few days the rumor of moving was confirmed; I was being sent to Oak Ridge, Danny to Argonne. Mattup kept winning, and "suggested" that we raise the stakes. By the day that we were to leave we owed him every cent we had.

I paid up soberly; I wouldn't give Mattup any satisfaction by complaining. It looked as though Danny wasn't going to "get" Mattup after all. But Danny surprised me.

"Look, buster," he wheedled. "If I pay you seventy-five bucks I won't have a cent left. How about me paying half now and the rest later?"

"No good," said Mattup. "You got it—pay me. If you can't pay cash gimme your watch. I know you got one."

"Look, buster—"

"Quit callin' me buster."

"What am I going to live on until I get paid again?"

"What do I care?"

It went on like that until the busses for the airport were nearly ready to leave and both men seemed angry enough to kill each other.

"Let's go," I begged Danny. "Pay him and leave."

"All right then!" Danny snap-

ped, and pulled out his wallet. He counted out all his bills into Mattup's hand.

"You're a buck short," said Mattup.

"Why not forget the buck?" said Danny. "You can spare it."

"You're a buck short," repeated Mattup, scowling.

Danny dashed his wallet to the ground. "You're even taking my change!" He got his jacket from the back of a chair—it was a hot day—and emptied change from the side pocket.

There were two quarters and a half dollar, and he paid them over. "I have eleven cents left," he said. "Hell, take that too. I don't give a damn."

Mattup grinned. "Sure I'll take it—if you weren't lying when you said I could have it."

"It'll break me," said Danny.

"I know it," said Mattup. "Gonna break your promise?"

The bus driver was honking. "The hell with you," Danny said to Mattup, and gave him a dime and a penny. He looked Mattup in the eye with a strange expression. "Now, I gave you that and you didn't win it. You took it of your own free will. I offered it to you and you took it. Right?"

"Right," said Mattup. "Sucker."

We scrambled on the bus and as it pulled away Danny yelled "Hey, Buster, look!" Mattup looked, and Danny stuck his right arm out the window, pointing at Mattup with his right forefinger and his little finger stuck out straight and parallel, the thumb tucked under. A strange, disturbed look came over Orley. He turned his back as the bus roared out of the drive.

At the airport Danny popped into a phone-booth and got Orley on the line—nobody seemed to care, either Outsiders or guards—and he let me listen.

"Spent your money yet, dead man?" purred Danny.

"Whacha mean, dead man?" gruffed Orley's voice. "You crazy or something?"

"You know that eleven cents extra you took?" gloated Danny. "It's gonna kill you, Buster, for killing Uncle Pete, and for everything else you've done. I know. I've been talking nights to Uncle Pete. You're a dead duck, Orley Mattup! Dead!"

"That's—I don't believe it, it's baloney! I'm going to spend that eleven cents and get rid of it."

"You do exactly that, Buster. I locked the curse on it, and I made the sign on you, and you have to keep that eleven cents the rest of your life. If you spend it—or if you lose it, and you will lose it—that's the end of you."

"I'll come out there and pound the hell out of you!" yelled Mattup.

"Too late, Buster, our planes are leaving. Goodby, dead man!"

And we had to run for our planes. Danny's pitch sounded pretty weak to me, even though Orley was superstitious, but I didn't get to tell Danny that until nearly five years later.

"I think I got him," said Danny. "You don't know the whole thing."

A hotel clerk had heen listening. "You mean Orley Mattup, the guard? He got sick, and said he had a hex on him, and took off one day and a lot later they found him up on the mountain. He was dead."

"Any money on him?" asked Danny.

"Jest some change. They buried it with him; they heard the hex was locked onto that money."

"Congratulations," I told Danny. "I didn't think it'd work. You scared him to death."

"Not quite," said Danny. "I scared him into hanging onto the money. That money would have killed anybody that carried it much longer than the few minutes I handled it. I'd been keeping the stuff in the reactor beam tubes. It was radioactive as hell."

"Well, there goes a brave, heroic man."

A department for all our readers throughout the world; here you can meet new friends who are interested in the same things you are. Listings are free, so send in yours today!

STUDENT

Robert Carr: 55 Lock St., Welland, Ont., Canada.

Age 15: "I'm interested in the serious thinking behind s-f—psi work, parallel worlds, time travel, the supernatural, and saucers. Hobbies include writing s-f, drawing, skin diving, jazz, acting, radio, and science."

HOUSEWIFE

Onalie Hansen: 1304 Prospect, SE, Grand Rapids 7, Mich.

Age 46: "My personal hobbies include collecting china and phonograph records. Like rock 'n roll with Tommy Sands having a slight edge. Other interests include astronomy, baseball, needle-point, and stock car racing. My husband and I are also interested in boats and may have a schooner of our own shortly. Have also studied ESP."

HOTEL MANAGER

Frank H. LeMar: 148 W. 74th St,. New York, N.Y.

Age 35: "I'm assistant manager of a small hotel chain, with my s-f interest going back 20 years. My other major hobby is amateur radio. I'd like to hear from other fans —particularly on any science fiction subject."

STUDENT

Molly O'Brien: 639 W. Wilson Ave., Coolidge, Ariz.

Age 15: "I'm a high school freshman, interested in all fields of science, especially astronomy and meteorology. I collect stamps and postmarks, and enjoy chess. Have been reading s-f for 5 years and would enjoy exchanging ideas on flying saucers with any other teenagers."

STUDENT

Jeff Kosmo: 943 Fairview, Bowling Green, Ohio.

Age 15: "I'm a chemistry bug, intending to become a chemical engineer and work with rockets. I have a four foot, liquid fuel rocket half completed; I play around with solid fuel ones also. Hope other s-f fans interested in chemistry and rockets will write."

STUDENT

Bob Butler: Box 305, Luidoso, New Mex.

Age 17: "I'm interested in s-f radio, TV (electronics in general), cars, girls, reading & writing. Particularly hope to hear from other fans in my general geographical area."

INTERVIEWER

Richard Grant: 2340 Covent Rd., Flint, Mich.

Age 22: "I'm single, and interview students for a dance studio. I'm interested in s-f, reincarnation, classical music, acting and modern interpretive dancing."

COFFEE WORKER

Leon J. Milcarek: 842 Haddon Ave., Camden 3, N.J.

Age 20: "I'm employed with a popular brand coffee concern, interested in the possibilities of space travel, life on other planets, time travel, music and dancing. Would like to hear from guys and gals similarly interested."

STUDENT NURSE

Dorothy Diehl: Nurses' Residence, Methodist Hospital, 506 6th St., Brooklyn 15, N.Y.

Age 17: "I'm in my first year of nurses training and am very interested in geriatrics. I'm a true s-f fan with a large collection. Other interests include music (all kinds, especially Calypso), modern art which I do not understand, and would like to hear from anyone interested."

BEAUTICIAN

Miss Stasiann Kozik: RFD 2, Vitale Trail, Bound Brook, N.J.

Age 21: "By profession I'm a beautician. My hobbies include dancing, reading, swimming, roller and ice skating, traveling, and TV viewing! Hope to hear from other fans, particularly in the New Jersey area."

BOOKKEEPER

Margaret Ann Rodgers: 347 W. Spazier Ave., Burbank, Cal.

Age 26: "I've been reading s-f for only nine months but love it. Would like to hear from guys and gals my age on s-f, books, or outdoor living. I'm a collector of stamps, coins, maps, bills, and paper-back s-f novels. Like sport minded people, with particular interest in horses. Hope to hear from others."

STUDENT

Mike Chial: 2494 Harvester Ave.,

St. Paul 6, Minn.

Age 14: "I'm a high school student with major interests astronomy, mythology, ESP, and almost every kind of music. Would also like to play chess by mail."

STUDENT

Manuel Guerra: 1790 E. 28th St., Lorain, Ohio.

Age 16: "I'm a high school student and work in the public library. My interests include s-f, astronomy, model railroading, chess, dancing, and collecting s-f books."

STUDENT

Sanford I. Greene: 63 Parkview Rd., Elmsford, N.Y.

Age 20: "I'm a college junior, majoring in psychology and education. I've been reading s-f for six years and other interests include stamp collecting and playing chess by mail."

SWEDISH FAN

Sigfrid Bock: Box 173, Polsboda, Sweden.

Age 14: "Please let your American fans know that I would like to hear from them. Am interested in s-f and astronomy."

STUDENT

Bruce W. Clark: RD 2, Clay, N.Y.

Age 17: "I work as a stock boy in a store here and just recently became interested in s-f. Am also interested in stamps, hunting, fishing, swimming, and chess."

RADIO ANNOUNCER

Wes Fellows: 612 13th St., Rawlins, Wyo.

Age 24: "I work as a radio announcer for KRAL in Rawlins. I enjoy hi-fi, photography, and radio. Would like to hear from other s-f fans interested in telepathy. Would someday like to create a radio program on same."

STUDENT

Steve Edelstein: 2521 Glenview Rd., Glenview, Ill.

Age 15: "I'm a high school student interested in electronics. Also study ESP and would like to hear from guys and gals."

STUDENT

Ronald Smith: 505 Imperial Ave., Modesto, Cal.

Age 17: "I'm a high school senior, interested in UFO, ESP, roller skating, archery and astronomy. Hope guys and dolls similarly inclined will write."

COLLEGE STUDENT

Frank Tepperman: 1382 Shakespeare Ave., Bronx 52, N.Y.

Age 24: "I'm interested in ESP —all of its phases and fields involved—hypnosis, telepathy, and psychic phenomena. Enjoy books on photographic memory and general self-improvement. Hobbies include chess, boxing, and tropical fish. Am particularly interested in anything having to do with study of the mind and its powers."

— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

SEA SIEGE

by Andre Norton, $3.00, 216 *pages, Harcourt, Brace and Company, New York, N.Y.*

As with most of Andre Norton's juveniles (in the best sense of the word) this is an exciting and entertaining piece of science fiction with the now popular deep-sea motif.

When the Navy started to build a "Hush-Hush Base" on this remote Caribbean isle of San Isadore, Griff Gunston knew that the rumors of H-bomb warfare were more than rumors.

But it is not with the hideous consequences of that war that he is concerned. Rather it is the fantastic size and intelligence of the island's octopi colony that makes him realize that the menace and effect of "fall-out" can be more horrible than what can come from space.

It is in the not unreasonable linking of these disparate elements, their fusing into a captivating story, that the excellence of Griff's experiences have been made.

Current preoccupation with deep-sea inventure inspired by Captain Cousteau of French Navy fame, and aided by the enthusiasm of Arthur C. Clarke, accounts for Norton's theme.

This is high adventure with enough of s-f to spice the compound. You'll enjoy it.

Conducted by Robert Bloch

HIGH ON MY PERSONAL hate-list (as a matter of fact, it's up among the first 10,000 entries) is the guy who set forth the notion that every writer's work is "autobiographical."

The idea that a writer must, knowingly or unknowingly, deal in self-revelatory material has been the basis of all sorts of misconceptions and much parlor-psychology. It has also been the cause of much grief to everyone who ever takes pen in hand or typewriter in two fingers.

Now, speaking as an individual (never mind the cracks about the two heads) I've suffered my share of misunderstandings because of this theory. People who read my horror stories expect me to be a Poe in person; those who read my humor anticipate encountering a slapstick comic; my hardboiled detective yarns evoke an image of a tough guy; and heaven only knows what is conjured up by my sex-perimental efforts in print.

I do know, however, that in person I'm a disappointment to all kinds of readers. The horror-fans meet somebody who strikes them as funny; the humor-addicts find that my jokes are horrible; the detective story readers decide that I look more like a victim than a killer, and even the most avid eroticists take one look at me and swear off sex forever.

But I have no intention of bringing all this up merely to cry on your shoulder; what I really mean to discuss is just how such a notion affects fans and fandom.

For fans, as has been frequently pointed out, are writers too. Primarily, fandom is a literary field; its unifying interest is a specialized

branch of writing known as science fiction, and its mediums of expression and communication are correspondence, commentary, and the editing of and writing for fan magazines.

As a result, fans are peculiarly liable to create false images of themselves and their personalities in the minds of other fans—their readers.

Quite recently, for example, G.M. Carr evolved a mental picture of Bob Silverberg as a pudgy, middle-aged type. He hastened to correct her—and when the two of them met for the first time in Cincinnati, both of them seemed amazed at how widely each differed from the imaginary concept each had built up about the other. For Silverberg is youthful, quiet, and the antithesis of pudgy; G.M. Carr—of human skin—is pleasant and friendly.

One of the most constantly amusing observations at recent science fiction conventions is the reaction of fans who encounter author Isaac Asimov for the first time. Invariably they express surprise when they are not confronted with a staid, absent-minded professorial type. What makes this so amusing to me is that the fans who confess to building up such a picture in their own minds are often unaware of the fact that they're completely "out of character" themselves.

Some fans, for example, have built a reputation on their caustic commentaries—as reviewers, or as social critics of the entire field of fan activity. I have yet to meet such a type who wasn't uncommonly affable in the flesh. True, they may respond to argument in conversation or on the floor during a convention session; but always they are quiet and gracious in social relationships. Strangely enough, they are often most friendly with the very targets of their written criticism.

The editors of some of the most garrulous and out-going fanzines often turn out to be so quiet and withdrawn in person that one scarcely knows they're around. Again, in a circle of intimates they may act or react otherwise; the fact remains that one seldom sees them up on the platform or dominating an informal group.

Long ago Walt Willis pointed out that a curious phenomenon occurs at conventions—people who are virtually unknown to fandom, in the sense that they seldom participate in fanzine publication or writing or in fan projects, suddenly emerge from year-round obscurity to dominate the convention proceedings. They spring up to take charge of meetings, to campaign in fan politics, to run the affair.

Conversely, many of those who have won wide reputations as Big Name Fans will show up at such a gathering and stand quietly in the background without even introducing themselves to close correspondents or associates in mutual fan-activities.

No, you can't tell a book by its cover, and you can't tell a fan's personality by what he writes or how he writes it. It is small wonder that, in years past, youngsters have masqueraded as adults and created

transvestite personalities—or, in several cases, entirely fictitious ones. The "Joan Carr" hoax lingers in the memories of fans, and now along comes another; "Alan Dodd" is revealed to be a group-creation of several British fans.

All this, of course, does not mean that certain personality-elements are not inherent in one's creative products; obviously there must be a relationship. But the relationship is seldom as direct as might be erroneously assumed. And care must be taken in assessing fans on the basis of their written or artistic efforts.

For this reason, although I have never met them, I am reasonably sure that artist William Rotsler is not a nudist; that Anglofan George Charters is not an octogenarian; that William Atheling, Jr., is kind to dogs and would always get up and give a little old lady his seat in the electric chair.

Actually, we're all a bit more complex than it's convenient for the other fellow to assume; we live in an age where it is so easy to simplify matters by merely pinning a generalized label on everyone we come in contact with. And writers of all sorts (the fan-field included) often find it expedient to deliberately create a phony image suitable for easy labelling

About the time this appears in print, we can expect to see a fair number of reports on the London Convention. It will be most interesting, I think, to discover just how many surprises occurred as American fans met their British cousins; just how widely the reality differed from the letter-and-magazine images created through the years. I predict that both American and English fandom experienced a number of shocks. And I further predict that, once the shocks have worn off, a better understanding resulted.

As I write, I've just received the first of these reports myself, by a recent returnee of London

In addition, I've had the pleasure of reading a number of the earliest published news accounts of the Convention And the crux of opinion seems, that both English and American fans were more impressed by their similarities than by their differences.

I venture to predict that in reports to come, the most recurrent over-all theme will be amazement over the fact that Convention atmosphere is the same the whole world over—*viz*, pretty smoky.

At the same time. there'll be the surprise I spoke about Anglofans, perhaps momentarily forgetting the financial factor involved in reaching London from the States, may express wonder over the apparent phenomenon of middle-aged American fandom They'll be puzzled because the Beanie Brigade didn't show up.

Americans may be equally astonished to discover that the much-puzzled British reserve is signally lacking in Convention groups

I am certain, once English convention reports reach these shores, that the writers will express surprise over how quiet Forrest J. Ackerman is in the flesh. . .how genial and affable Sam Moskowitz

can be in person. . .how amiably Boyd Raeburn conducts himself when not writing a *Derogation*. . . and what a living doll Rory Faulkner is, at all times.

Thus far, only one distressing rumor has reached me. A number of fans have gone so far as to insinuate that Chuck Harris and I look very much alike. This, on the face of it (or for that matter, on the faces of us) seems incredible. I suspect that it is merely a sneaky, underhanded way of attempting to insult us both.

But aside from this nasty and disturbing canard, it would seem that the Convention produced no other unhappy situations. And judging from the general tenor of the comments, it did much to further and strengthen international relationships in the fan field. The next step, of course, is for British fandom to emulate our example and send a plane-load of their own members over to the next American get-together.

This, the 16th World Science Fiction Convention, combined with the 11th West Coast Science Fiction Conference, combined with Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey, will take place in Los Angeles at the Hotel Alexandria, over Labor Day Weekend, 1958.

For a decade, now, fandom has resounded with the slogan, "South Gate in '58"—and although the Convention proper will be held in downtown L.A. rather than in the South Gate suburban area, it will fulfill fannish prophecy.

To this affair, the large body of West Coast fandom will be bringing an imposing amount of experience and enterprise—and, equally important—enthusiasm. The gang out there really wants this Convention, and is energetically dedicated to making it a good one. The Committee has already gone on record in several matters; expenses will be kept down, the affair will be "fannish" rather than self-consciously stuffy; the many local organizations seem united in their resolve to work in close cooperation for the success of the project.

Membership fee for those not planning to attend is $1—entitling you to a membership card, all issues of the Progress Report, and a Program Booklet. For those planning to attend, the total fee is $2, and from where I sit it looks like a bargain.

But right now is the time to join, so that the Committee will be able to plan properly in advance. Send your $1 or $2 to the Convention Treasurer—Rick Sneary, 2962 Santa Ana Street, South Gate, California.

Then, come next Labor Day, tear on out there and see if those West Coast fans live up to expectations. From what I've seen of them, they will; West Coast fans like to live it up.

And now, let's fan through the fanzines.

★ ★ ★

BRILLIG No 9 (Lars Bourne, 2436½ Portland St., Eugene, Oregon: 15c: irreg.) offers a well-balanced issue, and a completely unbalanced article by Kent Moomaw —THE SELF-APPOINTED CAPTIVE—which I nominate as the funniest dissertation on television-viewing ever to reach print.

SLANDER No. 2 (Jan Sadler Penney, 51-B McAlister Place, New Orleans 18, La.: 20c: bimonthly) is also dominated, this time around, by the presence of an exceptional article. In this case it's REMEMBRANCES OF IDIOCY, by Harlan Ellison. His is a thoughtful *critique* of fanzine writing and writers, and very well worth reading. I'd particularly recommend it to those editors who are most apt to get angry at any mention of what they label "ser-con material."

YANDRO No. V-8 (The Coulsons, 105 Stitt St., Wabash, Indiana: 10c, 12/$1: monthly) is largely a MidWesCon report this issue, and Bob Briney and Dick Lupoff each offer their account of the affair in Cincinnati. Something tells me there'll be another issue of YANDRO to report on before this column goes to press, so I'll defer further remarks until then.

TRIODE No. 11 (Eric Bentcliffe, 47 Alldis St., Great Moor, Stockport, Ches., England—but don't worry about writing out that long address, because U.S. subscriptions go to Dale R. Smith, 3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis, Minn.: 7/$1: irreg.) does for the Kettering Convention what YANDRO does for the MidWesCon. You'll find such familiar Anglofannish names as Eric Needham, Mal Ashworth, Terry Jeeves and Sid Brichby among the contributors this time around, in a neatly-produced and reproduced 40-page issue.

SPACE DIVERSIONS No. 9 (John Roles, 26 Pine Grove, Waterloo, Liverpool 22, England. trade or contribute; irreg.) is that collector's rarity, a British fanzine printed on *white* paper. It's actually the official organ of the Liverpool Science Fiction Society, and contributions of members make up most of the contents. This issue features everything from an article on Little Richard to a Pside view on Psionics.

FLAFAN No. 1 (Sylvia Dees, P.O. Box 4082, Mallory Hall, U. of Florida, Gainesville, Fa.: trade or contribute: irreg.) is a surprisingly large, surprisingly neat, and surprisingly-well-done first issue featuring colored illos and contributions—prose, poetry, and pictorial—by Larry Stark, Jean Young, John Berry, the pseudonymous Alan Dodd, William Rotsler, Dan Adkins, Dave Rike, Plato Jones, Atom and other familiar names in the fan field. This is one to watch.

MEUH No. 2-3 (Jean and Annie Linard, 24 Rue Petit, Vesoul, H.S., France: 25c: irreg.) cannot be described—it has to be seen to be believed, and even then you may have your doubts. Written in fannish *beche-de-mer* by a polygot Frenchman with a sense of humor, and featuring contributions from Stateside and Channelside fandom, this is beyond doubt the most unique of all current fanzines. The Linards are devotees of Pogo, MAD comics, and other American importations, but the predominant tone is one of Gallic wit and *bonhomie*. A *tres formidable* 72 pages makes this issue well worth the price. Linard is a dilettante in the grand tradition of his fellow-countrymen: Gilles de Retz, the Marquis de Sade, and Landru.

THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF OCULENTERATOLOGY No. 1 (Bob Leman, 2701 S. Vine St., Denver 10, Colo: no price: bimonthly) is, on the other hand, a Serious Constructive Effort of just six pages. No illos, no linos, nothing but High Moral Tone. The editor promises, in subsequent issues, to bring us material by "Algis Freud, John W. Pasteur, Jr., Frederik Kahn and C.M. Wasserman, Theodore Lister, and others as famous." Whether he makes good this threat or not, the fact remains that he has managed to pack as much genuinely entertaining and provocative reading-matter into six pages as the average fanzine offers in sixty. No one could ask for more—but I'm hoping there will be a lot more from this welcome and refreshing newcomer.

MOTLEY Mike Gates, c/o Lt. Col. J.R. Gates, Hdqtrs, NACOM, APO 757, New York, N.Y.: 15c, 4/50c: irreg.) is another of the fanzines springing up in the German Occupation Area. John Berry, Terry Jeeves and other Anglofans help out, and the green paper gives the issue the Anglofanzine look. As yet, there is no prevailing theme to stamp this magazine with a strong identity (and what a cruddy bunch of incompleted mixed metaphors *that* statement contains!) but there's promise of better things to come.

PLOY No. 10 (Bob Pavlat, 6001 43rd Ave., Hyattsville, Maryland: 4/50c: quarterly) is actually published by Ron Bennett in England. Dave Jenrette, Terry Jeeves, Arthur Thomson, and illustrator Bill Harry all offer entertaining material. Jenrette's report as to how an American fan reacts to British conventions is most interesting. John Berry (surprise!) offers a very offtrail story, and there are a number of sidelights on British beanie-wearers. Particularly for those of us who believe that existence is a way of life.

As I predicted and expected a few paragraphs back, a new issue of YANDRO (see previous listing) is in, and in addition to the editors, you'll find material by Ron Parker, Thomas Stratton, and Marion Zimmer Bradley, whose regular column deals this time around with THE GOLDEN BOUGH and Celtic mythology. The cover illo, by Juanita Coulson, is untitled, but apparently depicts the arrival of Gertrude M. Carr at the MidWes-Con.

ZODIAC No. 4 (Larry Sokol, 4131 Lafayette Avenue, Omaha 31, Neb.: 10c bimonthly) offers Neal F. Wilgus, Honey Wood Graham, John Berry, Arthur Thomson, and an O.T. Geshu, which may or may not be a pseudonym for Ernest Hemingway. This is a miscellaneousine, but the prevailing tone is light. Same holds true for

STELLAR (Ted E. White, 1014 N. Tuckahoe St., Falls Church, Va.: 15c. 5/50c: bimonthly) Actually STELLAR comes out five times a year, but it would take two extra words for me to say that in my listing, and I want to save space, so I very cleverly avoided wasting wordage and only mention it here to show you how smart we professionals are when it comes to being

concise. Actually, the issue under consideration will be followed by a new and different type in a few weeks as editor White abandons the emphasis on fan-fiction and goes into the general field. This particular sample, bowever, contains some fine and funny parodies of pro-fiction; original and reprinted from other 'zines. Paul Spencer, Ron Parker, Gregg Calkins, Dale R. Smith, Terry Jeeves, Cliff Gould turn in excellent work here. Artwork, including a nice impressionistic cover in color by Jack Harness, is exceptional; add the editorial efforts of White and Assistant Editor Richard Eney and the fanzine reviews of Franklin Ford and you have a superior job, allround. If this standard can be maintained under the new editorial policy, this will rate as one of the top 'zines.

INSIDE SCIENCE FICTION (Ron & Cindy Smith; Box 356, Times Square Station, New York, N.Y.: 30c, 4/$1: three times a year) is, of course, a new version of the prize-winning INSIDE which used to come out bimonthly for a quarter. Editor Smith is cutting down the schedule, raising the number of pages to justify the increase in price—and, meanwhile, offering one of the best 'zines on the market, in terms of appearance, artwork, and content. It's a "sercon" effort, with plenty of humor in a satirical vein; the present issue, for example, is partially devoted to a complete takeoff of what is called RESOUNDING SCIENCE FICTION. In addition, James E. Gunn, Bob Leman and Lin Carter offer articles, and Cindy Smith's deft touch is visible in the artwork and headings. I was particularly struck by two full-page burlesques of advertisements: some of the self-proclaimed "insurgent" fanzines should only achieve this level in their humor.

VARIOSO No. 15 (John Magnus, Jr., 6 S. Franklintown Rd., Baltimore 23, Md.: no price: irreg.) makes one of its all-too infrequent appearances in the mailbox. Magnus, too, is more or less "sercon" but this is (to my way of thinking) a desirable trait in a science fiction fan—as opposed to jazz fans, sports-car fans, comics fans and other enthusiasts in the field who are apt to decry a "sercon" interest in science fiction; while at the same time they are extremely serious about their *own* preoccupations. Except for the illustrations, the editor is solely responsible for the content of this issue. As always, his opinions are emphatic and interesting. Even more so when (as has happened in my case in the past) one sometimes disagrees with them. The field can always use and benefit from lively and stimulating discussion. *Magnus cum laude.*

ETHERLINE No. 87 (John Hitchcock, 15 Arbutus St., Baltimore 28, Md.: monthly: 13/$1) is published by the Amateur Fantasy Publications of Australia, and I'm so impressed by the fact that it has gone 87 issues that I mixed up the price and the publication schedule in my notice above. ETHERLINE, as always, features world-wide reviews of prozines, movies, books, and fan-mags, utilizing the talents of an international staff to give its pages a cosmopoli-

tan flavor. In each issue is an AUTHOR STORY LISTING—the biographical data and appearances in print of a prominent sf pro. Aside from the special reports on Australian fan-clubs, you don't have to be a kangaroo to enjoy this magazine. Although, of course, in Australia the magazine is *delivered* by kangaroos, right from the mail-pouch. Or is it the female-pouch?

SHANGRI-LA (George W. Fields, 3607 Pomona Blvd., Montebello, Calif.: 15c, 6/$1: quarterly) is the official organ of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Society. As such, it will be an increasingly important publication in fandom throughout the coming months, because of its close connection with the 1958 World Science Fiction Convention. The present issue already devotes considerable discussion to the projects and plans being formulated for the affair, and does a good job of presentation, too. Besides, it contains a Tucker reprint from 1941, so I *have* to recommend it. Either that or give Tucker his dime back. Which would be unthinkable, because he'd only squander it on liquor and poker.

SCIENCE FICTION TIMES (Fandom House, PO Box 2331, paterson 23, N.J.: 10c: bi-weekly) comes up with its 278th issue to celebrate its Sixteenth Anniversary—and it's a lovely offset job, too, with Ted Carnell, Fred Pohl, James Blish, Don Ford, Forry Ackerman, Harry Harrison, Damon Knight and Dick Ellington among its contributors—plus a full page of Kelly Freas cartoons, pics of Frank R. Paul and his new sf illo, and Dave Kyle and his new bride. A mighty fine job, from a mighty fine magazine; which, incidentally, copped another award at the recent London Convention. You don't get an offset issue every time, but if enough fans subscribe, the editors intend to go offset regularly. Their 279th issue, also at hand, gives a fine and full Convention Report by John Victor Peterson. Our congratulations to SCIENCE-FICTION TIMES for their long record of achievement, for winning the award, and for just continuing to be the best news-zine in the field.

SPECTRE (Bill Meyers, 4301 Shawnee Circle, Chattanooga 11, Tenn.: 15c/8/$1: quarterly) offers us the other extreme, with a first issue. But 45 pages, lots of colored artwork, and a lineup of fiction, columns and articles by such fans as Ron Parker, Greg Benford, George W. Fields, Guy Terwilliger and John Berry guarantee that you get your money's worth, and that the editor is really going all out to put this 'zine on the map. Rotsler illos, too—of *course!* Plus a half-dozen other well-known fan artists.

Two issues ago, this column was brutally looped off right in the middle of a sentence, by a heartless editor and a sadistic printer, who left me with my participles dangling.

I've got a few more fanzines at hand to review, but this time I'm taking no chances. I'm going to quit right now when I'm ahead. And I advise you to do the same. See you next issue!

—*Robert Bloch*

Letters from the Readers

PLUG GRANTED

Dear Bill:

I couldn't help noticing that your book reviewer (name escapes me at the moment) in reviewing my THE NAKED SUN in the December issue mentioned a non-fiction book of mine and praised it highly—for which I thank him.

It occurred to me, however, that he didn't mention the name of the book and it would be a shame if some readers might feel persuaded to read the book and be held back by not knowing the vital statistics. May I say then, that the book referred to is INSIDE THE ATOM and that it was published by Abelard-Schuman, Ltd., 404 Fourth Ave., New York 16, N.Y.

Incidentally, I am glad that Bob Bloch revealed to the world that I am a shy, retiring fellow. I don't know where the rumor started that I am a loud, self-confident extrovert, but it is time it was squelched.

Isaac Asimov
45 Greenough St.
West Newton 65, Mass.

Don't blame the reviewer—what's his name?—oh, yes, Henry Bott. I slipped up on the vital statistic. So ok, with this plug you'll sell out. As to the rumor, Ike, we're happy to help squelch it. You're really the most shy and retiring bull ever to grace a china shop. There now, that should fix things! .....wlh

LOOSE SHOES

Dear Bill:

Just got the December issue in the mail. One look at the cover and I jumped out of my size eleven shoes. I told myself, "That cover should sell the whole print order! It has that sense of wonder that's lacking in modern day covers and I'll be satisfied if the novel is half as good."

The illo for RESCUE MISSION was also fine. I like BEM's.

Ditch the science articles and use more letters. And try and get Bob Williams to do more stories. I still like Bob Bloch. He makes *Madge* fun to read.

Ted Christakes

4413 W. 127th St.
Blue Island, Ill.

Rather than ditch science articles we've got a plan shaping up to present a top-notch one each issue. Sort of a feature attraction. More about this very soon—probably next issue. Bob Williams has been lax in s-f writing lately but maybe he'll get on the ball soon. We'll see ....wlh

WEAKER S-F STORIES . . .

Dear Mr. Hamling:

I have been a science fiction reader since 1953, and the very first magazine I ever read was *Madge*. I think that *Madge* is one of the best in the field, but s-f stories these days aren't what they used to be. I've noticed this in all the s-f magazines. Wonder why.

I like all of your features, although the name COSMIC PEN CLUB has a Captain Marvel air. Couldn't you think of a better name? I enjoy FANDORA'S BOX and I think that Bob Bloch has the best fan column in any prozine. Every time I read a comment in the letter section that FANDORA'S BOX should go, I get the impression that the writer doesn't know what fandom really means. Somebody should clarify this.

Barbara W. Lex
North Shimerville Rd.
Clarence, N.Y.

It's a natural thing to look back at the stories of a few years ago and feel they were better. In some cases, of course, true. Generally it's simply nostalgia. A fw years from now we'll probably reflect on the yarns of today! . . . Fandom really means s-f hobbyists having fun. Only in science fiction do readers follow the subject so avidly that fan clubs are formed and annual conventions held. It's one of the unique things about science fiction. Bloch does a good job keeping active fans aware of what is going on in the fan field—and also briefing casual s-f readers. .....wlh

TOP HAMILTON NOVEL

Dear Bill Hamling:

I would like to be one of the very first to tell you that FUGITIVE OF THE STARS in the December issue was the best story Ed Hamilton has ever done for *Madge*. This was so good that it merits beside his best work for other magazines. It will be a long time before I'll forget this story!

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

Ed will have a number of others for you to enjoy. How about this issue for a start .....wlh

PASS THE CLOTHESPIN

Dear Editor Bill:

A few comments about your magazine isn't exactly what I originally meant this letter to be. In fact, my reason for writing will perhaps surprise you.

You publish a good magazine in *Madge*—good features, cartoons, and well-written stories. But most of all, in my opinion (and hold on to your quill) the outstanding feature of *Madge* is that it *smells* good!

That's right. One way to enjoy magazines is by the odor they have. I'm sure everyone notices this on

opening a new book or magazine. The wonderful fragrance (sometimes not so wonderful) floats into the nostrils. To me at any rate your magazine is distinct by its odor—which certainly coincides with the rest of its quality.

Keep up the good smelling.

Virgil Wayne Roberts
1725 Jennifer
Houston 29, Texas

We'll bet you smell nice too!.....wlh

READABLE, THAT'S US

Dear wlh:

The cover on the December issue was really good. Smith's work sometimes reminds me of Bob Jones' covers that used to grace AS and FA. They couldn't be the same person, could they?

Ed Hamilton's lead novel was terrific too. He and Dwight Swain are your best writers. Keep them. The short stories were about average, except for RESCUE MISSION wherein Silverberg hit an all-time low. However, Garrett's SATELLITE OF DEATH was good. Now for a few points:

1. Use 2 staples in binding the issues. Can't be that much more expensive!
2. Hang onto Bloch—he's tops.
3. If you must use tinted illos use less sickening shades.
4. Shoot the whole art staff.
5. Abolish the COSMIC PEN CLUB. That's for kids.
6. More reviews in the S-F LIBRARY.
7. What ever happened to Geoff St. Reynard? He was good.

Well, that winds up my comments. *Madge* doesn't publish anything of great stature, but it is consistently readable and much enjoyed by me.

Brad Daigle
1854 Cambridge
Milwaukee, Wisc.

Malcolm Smith and Robert Gibson Jones are two different artists. Now for your points: 1. We use 1 staple because the binding equipment is such that for magazines the size of MADGE and IMAGINATIVE TALES only one stitch can be made. 2. We're hanging on. 3. The color hasn't made us sick—yet. 4. Including Malcolm Smith? 5. We're all kids at heart—huh? 6. As many as we can fit in. 7. Now that's a good question. We'd like to know too. Perhaps Geoff will read this and stop writing best-selling books long enough to do us a new science fiction novel .....wlh

GOOD EYESIGHT

Dear Bill Hamling:

I just finished reading your letter section in the December issue and decided I ought to put in a word myself.

Your cover as usual was extremely good. Keep it up. You can spot an issue of *Madge* a mile away simply by looking at the cover.

I have to hand it to Ed Hamilton. His FUGITIVE OF THE STARS had good suspense. But Tom Harris' THE FALL OF ARCHY HOUSE in my opinion was too low-grade for *Madge*.

On the whole the magazine continues to get better.

Tom Baugh
1800 Lee Ave.
Arcadia, Calif.

The way most newsstands display science fiction (hidden behind everything else) it's surprising you're able to find it let alone see it a mile away! This is one of our pet peeves and we like to ask our readers to help s-f by keeping the magazines out front—pick them up and put them there! And by all means, if stores in your area don't carry sufficient or any s-f magazines (ours in particular!) call in a complaint to your local magazine wholesale firm. It's listed in your phone book under magazine distributors .....wlh

1ST MAGNITUDE YARN

Dear Bill:

Just finished the December issue of *Madge* Thanks for bringing back Ed Hamilton at his best! When he writes like he did in FUGITIVE OF THE STARS which I rank as a 1st Magnitude Story, it takes a mighty good writer to top him. His THE SHIP FROM INFINITY (November, '57 IMAGINATIVE TALES) was almost up there but had a weaker ending.

Silverberg and Garrett got together and wrapped it up good with HERO FROM YESTERDAY. HOUSE OPERATOR was a real yarn even though I guessed the outcome. RESCUE MISSION and SATELLITE OF DEATH were both good too.

The only sour apple was THE FALL OF ARCHY HOUSE. P.U. And I don't mean Purdue University! But don't worry too much. Your batting average is plenty high.

Charles D. Wilson, Jr.
124 B SW
Miami, Okla.

We're aiming higher . . . . . wlh

YOU'VE GOT US BAWLING

Dear Bill Hamling:

I've been buying both of your magazines for quite awhile now and I think it's about time I aired a few complaints. First, your cover art, while utilizing the colors of the rainbow and seemingly attractive on first sight, represent poor craftsmanship.

Smith may be a good artist, but I've seen better work by him elsewhere. His cover on the December issue is quite sickening and I would venture to say that fandom has produced better.

Nor are your logos (titles) of an artistic nature. A revamping of both IMAGINATION and IMAGINATIVE TALES would be a decided improvement.

Inside matters are worse. Your usual hamstrung sentence, "Come on, gang, send in those subs! Turn the page. . ." and its slight variations is just as nauseating as it was the day you first pounded it out.

For all intent and purpose it is evident you are catering to the younger set, and as a member of that set I feel downright insulted to think that anyone, especially a thirty-six year old editor wouldn't give us teen-agers more credit than that.

Do you envision yourself as a Sgt. Saturn or something? I could go on but I'm sure I've hurt your feelings enough so save your tears.

Larry Sokol
4131 Lafayette Ave.
Omaha 31, Nebr.

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"SCREWBALL" MAGAZINES?

Dear wlh:

Your December issue just fell into my hands due to the fact that there were no science fiction magazines on the local newsstand. I very seldom buy the "silly" stuff, or, as it is known in fandom, "screwball magazines". I must say that I was pleasantly surprised by your current issue. Much to my surprise I enjoyed the whole issue.

I did like the old time air of your fan section. Some of the selections you made for printing were a bit slanted—surely you can't have *that* many mad screaming admirers?

Look, if you are going to conduct a letter section why not drop the pecans that write the old monotonous letters about— "I liked No. 1 etc." I always grit my teeth at these squirrels.

Don't drop the COSMIC PEN CLUB. I like it. FANDORA's BOX is so far out of date it's laughable. And in answering letters don't be so long-winded. You got a yen to see your own words in print? Get off it!

Chris Steel
Box 71
Sumner, Wash.

Okay . . . . . wlh

HAMILTON OUTSTANDING

Dear Bill:

Just finished reading the December *Madge*.

Cover was pretty good. The lead novel—excellent! Hamilton's FUGITIVE OF THE STARS and his SHIP FROM INFINITY (latter in November TALES) were two of the most outstanding novels of the year.

Let's have more Hamilton. And also Alex Blade and Dwight Swain.

Bruce Taylor
168 Alling St.
Kensington, Conn.

There'll be more novels by your favorites right away. . . . Which winds up shop for this issue. See you next month. . . . . wlh

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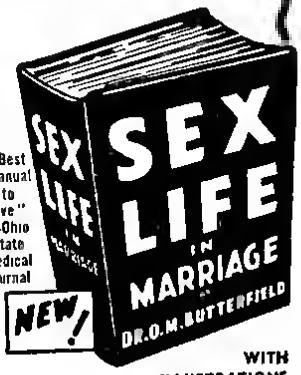

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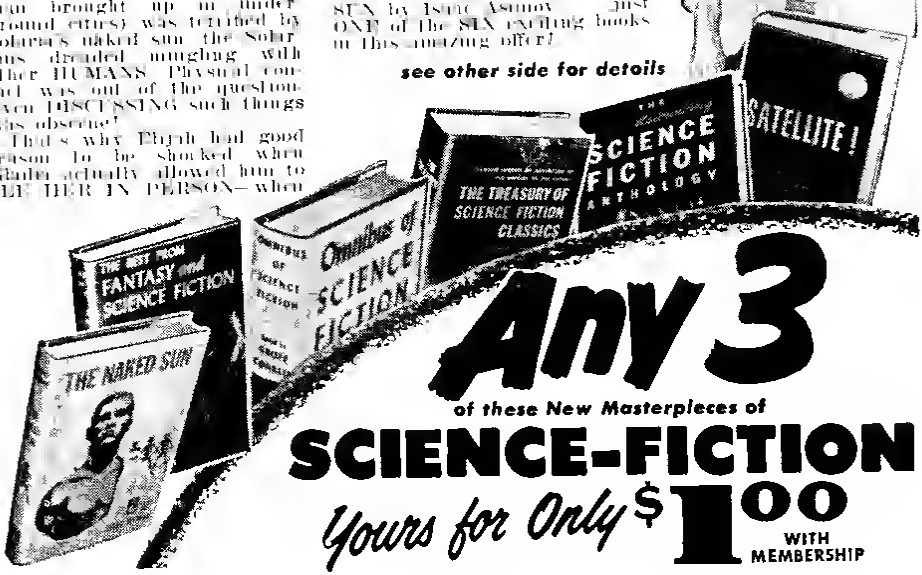

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